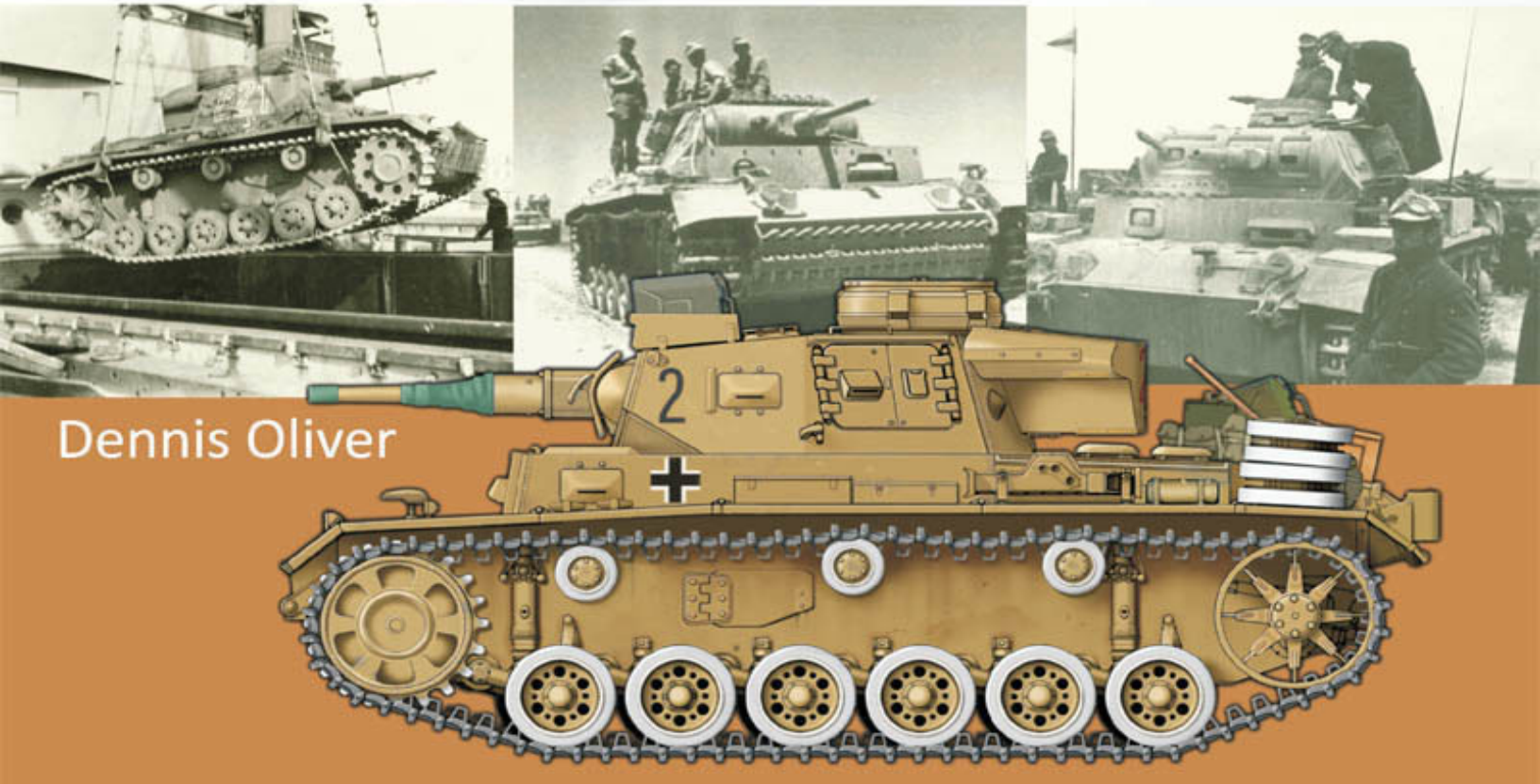
PANZER III

TANK CRAFT

GERMAN ARMY LIGHT TANK
NORTH AFRICA
TRIPOLI TO EL ALAMEIN, 1941-1942



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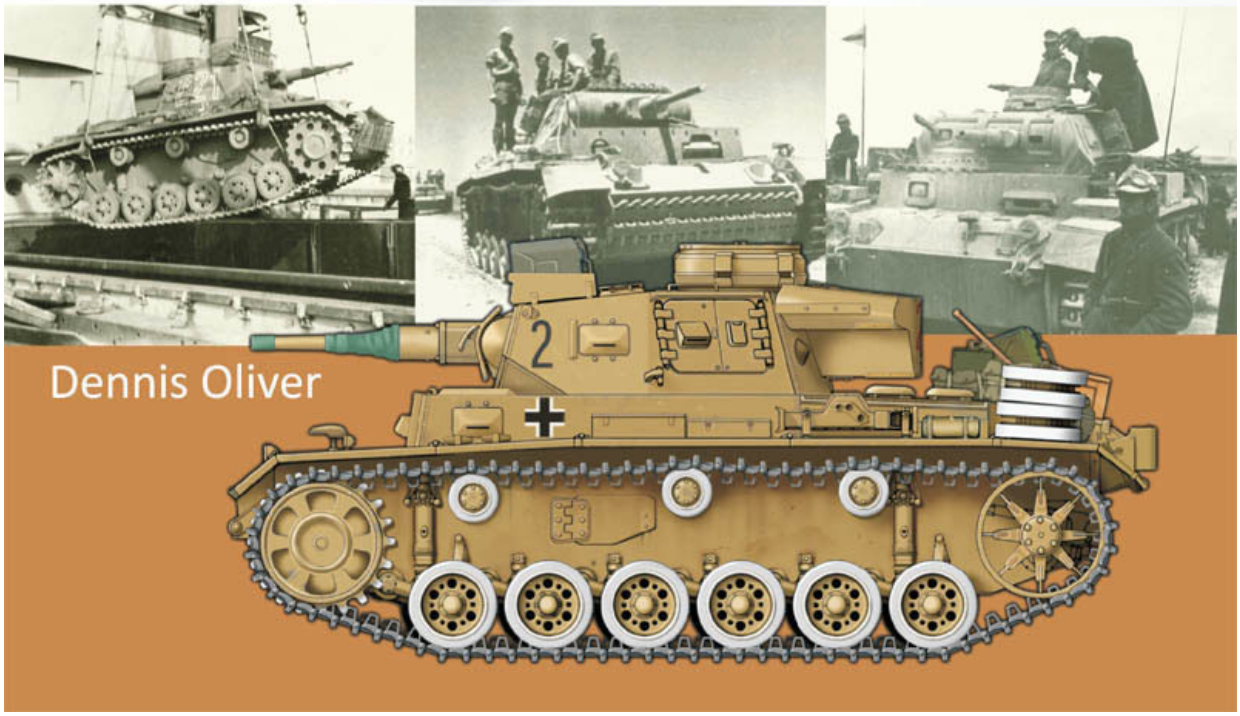

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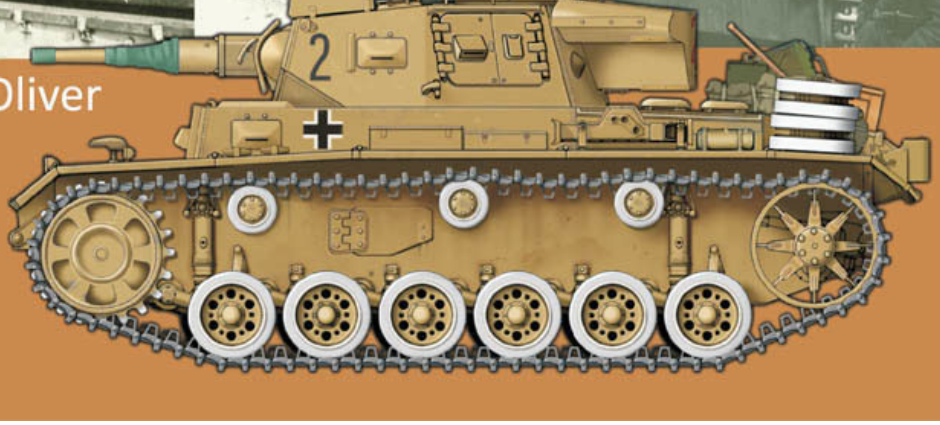

Dennis Oliver

Pzkpfw III tanks photographed in the Libyan desert in mid-1941. Other images of these vehicles show that they are from 1.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5. Note the very patchy appearance of the camouflage, common at this time, and the canvas covers for the main gun and MG 34.

TankCraft 36

PANZER III

GERMAN ARMY LIGHT TANK

NORTH AFRICA

TRIPOLI TO EL ALAMEIN, 1941-1942

Dennis Oliver

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Front cover. At top: Sungjun Jang's Pzkpfw III ausf J in 1/35 scale built and painted to represent a vehicle of 3.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 8. The photographs in the centre depict, from left to right, a Pzkpfw III ausf G of 2.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5 being unloaded in Tripoli in March 1941. A Pzkpfw III ausf J of 5.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 8 pictured in mid-1942. A Panzerbefehlswagen III ausf E from the headquarters of I.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 8 photographed in late 1941. The illustration at the foot of the page depicts a Pzkpfw III ausf H of 6.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 8. The colours used on these tanks are discussed in detail in the Camouflage & Markings and Technical Details and Modifications sections of this book.

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INTRODUCTION 1

Perhaps no other armoured vehicle better epitomises the so-called Blitzkrieg Era of the Second World War than the Panzerkampfwagen (Pzkpfw) III light tank. Although its use was limited to a handful of vehicles during the Polish campaign, by May 1940, when the German army crossed into Holland, Belgium and France, a total of 381 Pzkpfw III tanks were in service with Germany's armoured regiments. Ordered into production in 1937, the development prototypes were fitted with a 3.7cm main gun and two machine guns and the armour was of 15mm thickness, which was capable of withstanding any anti-tank rifle in use at the time. The initial variants, designated Pzkpfw III ausf A, B, C and D, were little more than research and development vehicles with just sixty of all types being built but the Pzkpfw III ausf E, which went into production in 1938, featured a much-improved torsion bar suspension, which had been developed by Porsche, and this arrangement proved so successful that it was used on all future variants (1).

But the design's real advantage lay in running the drive shaft under the vehicle floor which allowed for a turret to be placed at the centre of the hull and created room for a five-man crew. Additionally, the entire crew was linked by a radio communication system which allowed orders to be passed efficiently and quickly even in the noise of battle. These were enormous advantages in an era when tank crews were commonly made up of just two or three soldiers who were forced to communicate through hand signals. From July 1940, during the production run of the Pzkpfw III ausf F, the more potent 5cm KwK 38 L/42 gun became standard and many older models were updated with the most recent modifications as they were returned to the factories for repair. Of the 297 tanks that were shipped to North Africa with Panzer-Regiment 5 and Panzer-Regiment 8 between February

and May 1941, a total of 142 were versions of this sturdy and reliable vehicle (2). Indeed, the first German tank to be unloaded in Libya was a Pzkpfw III. When one considers that they were supported by only forty of the 7.5cm-armed Pzkpfw IV tanks the importance of the lighter vehicle becomes obvious.

In Tankcraft 27: Panzer III German Army Light Tank, Operation Barbarossa 1941 we examined the versions of the tank that took part in the invasion of the Soviet Union, including the very first variants. I have concentrated in this book on the Pzkpfw III ausf G, ausf H, and ausf J with some mention of later versions, as these were the most commonly seen variants in North Africa up to the time of the battles around El Alamein.

From November 1942, with the withdrawal from El Alamein and the Allied landings in Morocco and Algeria, the complexion of the campaign changed significantly and Hitler's new-found interest saw up-gunned and up-armoured models shipped to North Africa including the 7.5cm-armed Pzkpfw III ausf N and a few of the Pzkpfw III ausf M. These tanks, the last of the production series, and the fighting in Tunisia will be examined in a future volume.

Notes

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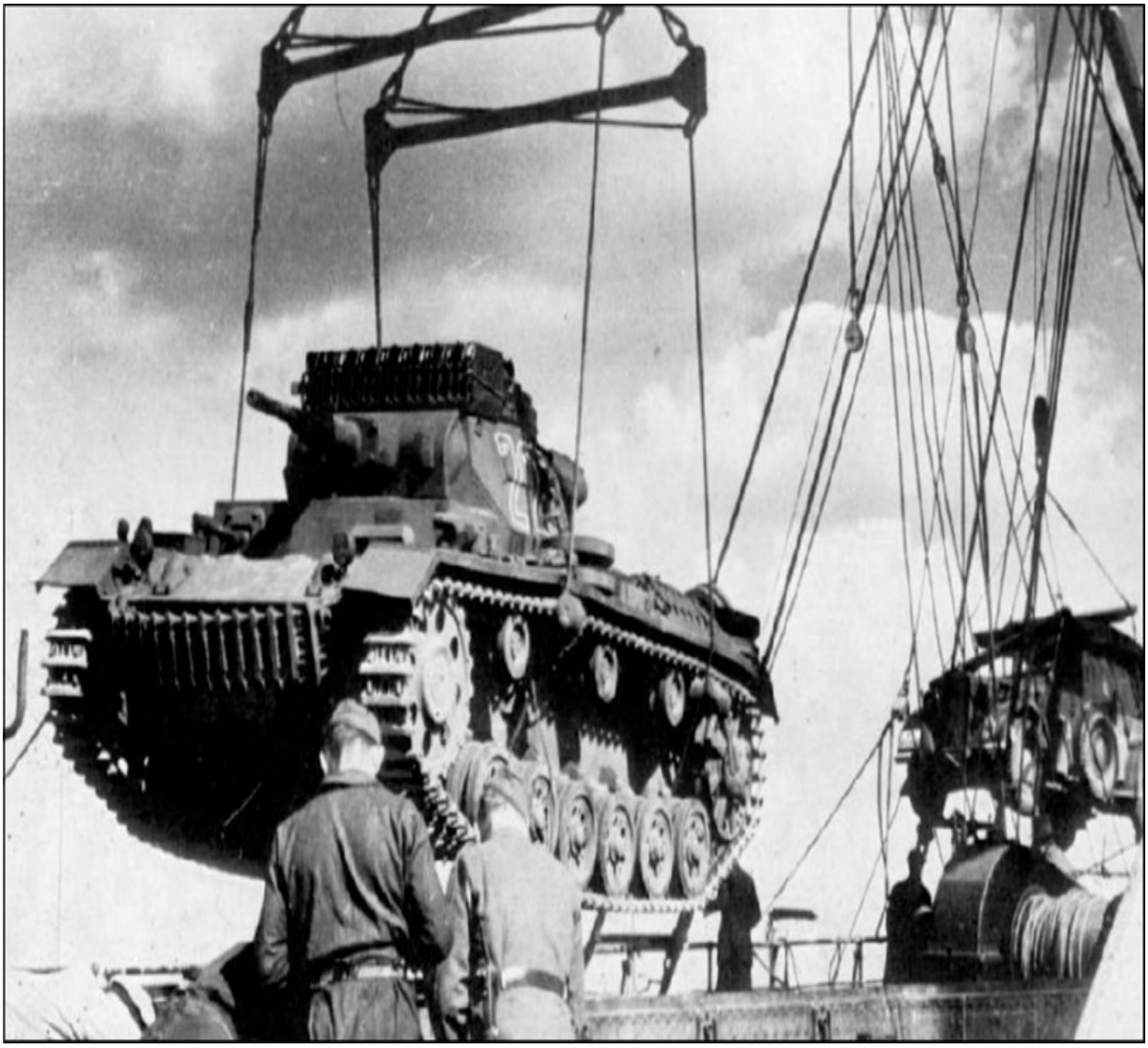
1. The German term ausführung, which will be familiar to many readers of this series, can be translated here as model or type and is abbreviated as ausf throughout this book.

2. I have deliberately excluded the handful of Befehlspanzerwagen command tanks from this calculation as they were armed with

machine guns only. It should also be pointed out that 115 Pzkpfw I and Pzkpfw II light tanks were with the Deutsches Afrikakorps and these had by this time been relegated to a scouting role.



A Pzkpfw III ausf G, or early ausf H, of 2.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5 being loaded for shipment to North Africa. Note the position of the forward return roller, indicating that the hull was built after July 1940. The trackguards of almost all these tanks were damaged by the loading process as can be seen here.

THE GERMAN ARMY IN NORTH AFRICA

Tanks of 6.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5 drawn up along the Corso Italo Balbo, present-day Sharia Umar al-Mukhtar, in Tripoli on 12 March 1941. Note the early-style rear idlers and drive sprockets. Note also that the vehicle at the centre of the photograph has the forward return roller placed much closer to the drive sprocket indicating that it was assembled at a later date than the other tanks.

On 9 September 1940 the Italian 10th Army, based in the province of Cyrenaica, began an invasion of Egypt codenamed Operazione E which would take them as far as El Maktila, some 80 kilometres beyond their starting point. Withdrawing 20 kilometres to Sidi Barrani, they dug in and awaited supplies and reinforcements. The British Commonwealth forces facing the Italians had deliberately avoided a major confrontation and limited their actions to minor skirmishing and reconnaissance while preparing defensive positions at Mersa Metruh, almost 100 kilometres further to the east. On 9 December 1940 a British counteroffensive codenamed Operation Compass, which was initially planned as a limited raid, was launched and succeeded so spectacularly that 10th Army was cut off south of Benghazi by the first week of February 1941 and forced to surrender. Facing the loss of the African colonies, Mussolini immediately dispatched motorised and armoured units to North Africa and also turned to Hitler for assistance.

German plans for a possible deployment in the Mediterranean had been prepared as early as July 1940, less than a month after the successful conclusion of the French campaign and Generalmajor Walter Warlimont, the German army's senior operations officer, had suggested that an armoured force be sent to Libya to support any Italian incursion into Egypt. On 5 September 1940 the Italian military attaché in Berlin was informed that Hitler was prepared to send an armoured brigade to assist his ally in North Africa and although no reply was received this can only have prompted Mussolini to insist that Operazione E begin without delay.

Convinced that the early British withdrawals amounted to a great Italian victory, Maresciallo Pietro Badoglio, the chief of staff of the Italian armed forces, stated that German ground troops, including armoured units, would not be needed.

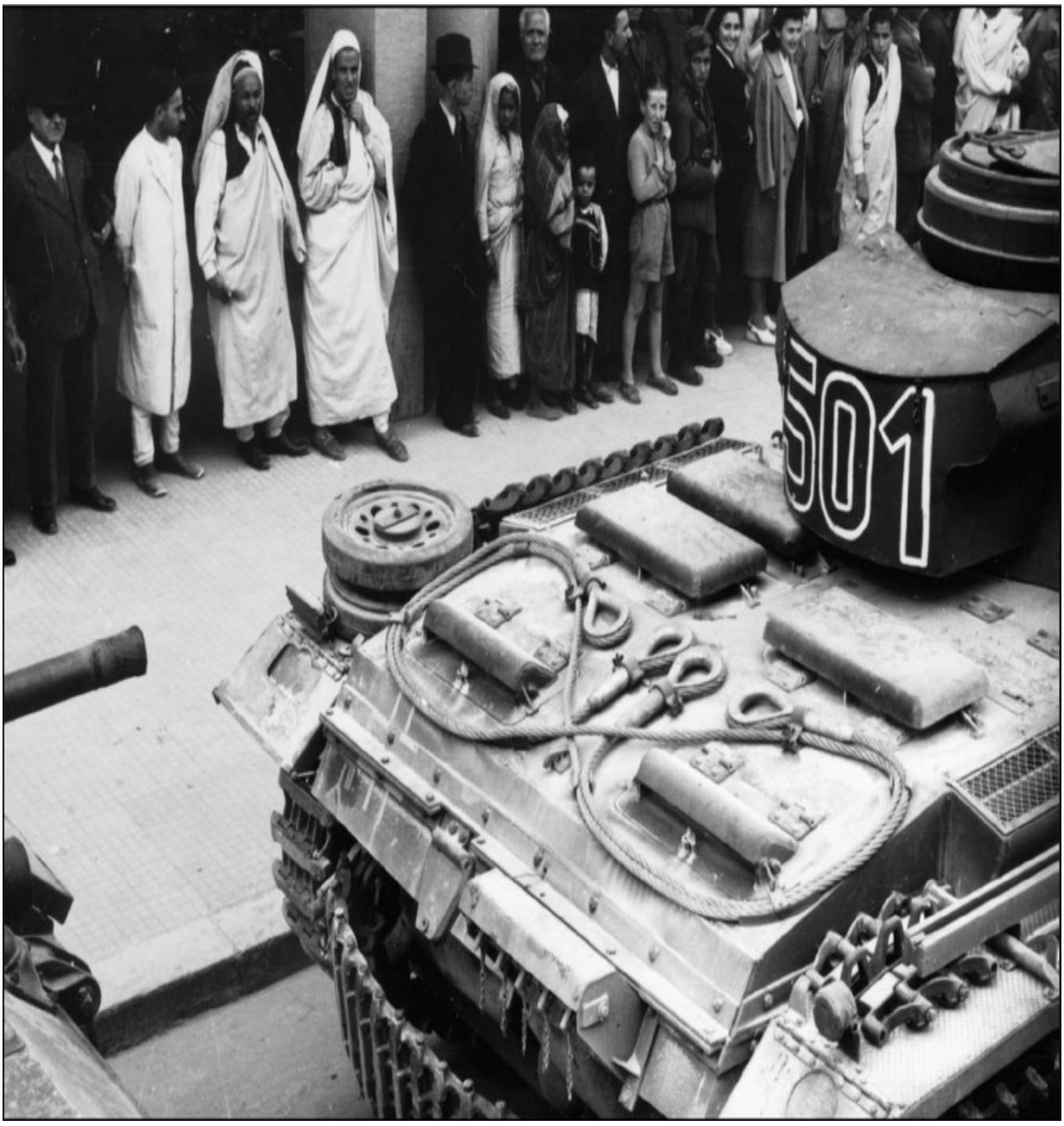
Hitler, who rarely listened to his own generals, ignored Badoglio's appraisal and at a secret meeting with Mussolini on 3 October 1940 offered 100 German tanks and their support vehicles which could be sent to North Africa almost immediately, an offer which Mussolini accepted. But on 28 October, in a surprise move, the Italians invaded Greece and an incensed Hitler threatened to abandon what he termed Italy's 'Libyan adventure' entirely. As late as 4 November 1940 Hitler confided in his commanders that no German ground units would be sent to North Africa, claiming that Mussolini was attempting to build an empire with German blood. Within a week he had reversed his stance and ordered the Kriegsmarine to be ready to transport large numbers of men and equipment to North Africa with the condition that the Italians reach Mersa Metruh.

But with the launch of Operation Compass, British units pushed into Cyrenaica and the Italian 10th Army fell apart. In a single day British and Australian units took 38,000 prisoners, among them four generals. On 19 December 1940 the Italians officially requested German assistance in the form of an armoured division and, quite unrealistically, enough equipment to outfit ten Italian divisions. As the year drew to a close the Italian attaché in Berlin pleaded that without German help North Africa would be lost. Oberkommando des Heeres (OKH), the army's high command, suggested that a holding formation be despatched to Libya to stabilise the Italian front but after listening to the report of Generalmajor Hans Freiherr von Funck, who had travelled to North Africa, Hitler insisted that the force be expanded to a complete division with an additional division to follow (1). On Saturday, 1 February 1941 the commander of 3.Panzer-Division was ordered to relinquish Panzer-Regiment 5 and other elements of his division which would be used to form 5.leichte Afrika-Division, the first unit of the German army to be sent to North Africa.

821
822

A panoramic view of the Corso Italo Balbo looking towards modern-day Green Square, a public park adjacent to Tripoli's harbour, with tanks of Panzer-Regiment 5. All are painted in RAL 7021 Schwartzgrau and are identified by the large white turret numbers employed by this regiment. The vehicles in the foreground include Pzkpfw I, Pzkpfw II and Pzkpfw IV tanks of 8.Kompanie. In front of those are Pzkpfw II tanks of 5.Kompanie with a single Panzerbefehlswagen I behind tank number 545. The vehicles lined up along the right side of the street are from 1.Kompanie while the Pzkpfw III tanks of 6.Kompanie can be seen in the background.

II01



Both images on this page were taken from the same sequence of photographs as the tanks on the previous pages. Above: This Panzerbefehlswagen III ausf E is identified as a command tank from Stab, II.Abteilung of Panzer-Regiment 5 by the turret number II01. Note that the number is repeated on the small metal rhomboid attached to the radio aerial's protective trough, the latter another identifying feature of these purpose-built tanks. Below: A Pzkpfw III of

5.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5, 5.leichte Afrika-Division awaiting the start of the parade through the streets of Tripoli. The unit insignia of 3. Panzer-Division, the regiment's former parent formation, is clearly visible on the hull rear plate next to the Balkenkreuz national insignia and was carried by many vehicles of Panzer Regiment 5. Officially, its use was to end in October 1941 but it could still be seen until the last days of the year at least. The Tropen, or tropical service modifications, particularly the additional ventilation hatches, can be seen here and these and others features are discussed in the Technical Details and Modifications section of this book.

Most readers will be familiar with the term Afrika Korps which is often used as a blanket description when referring to the German units which took part in the North African campaign. Strictly speaking the Deutsches Afrikakorps was the initial expeditionary force which eventually consisted of 15.Panzer-Division, 21.Panzer-Division and 90.leichte Afrika-Division. Although the organisation was somewhat elastic, and many Italian formations were temporarily attached, these three divisions generally fought under the same command from late 1941 until 1943.

As the German presence in North Africa grew a number of organisational changes took place and these are explained below.

Deutsches Afrikakorps. Initially formed on 16 February 1941 as Stab des Befehlshabers der deutschen Truppen in Libyen, or the staff of the commander in chief of the German troops in Libya, this formation was renamed Deutsches Afrikakorps (DAK) on 21 February 1941. DAK initially consisted of Panzer-Regiment 5 and Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 3, which had been detached from 3.Panzer-Division, with various support elements including a Panzerjäger battalion. These units were combined to form

5.leichte Afrika-Division and in late April and early May 1941 the first tanks of 15.Panzer-Division had also been unloaded (2).

Commanded by Generalleutnant Erwin Rommel, a favourite of Hitler, the DAK was merely intended as a blocking force, or Sperrband, to counter the British Commonwealth units that had pushed the Italian 10th Army back to Benghazi in Cyrenaica, present-day western Libya, which was at the time an Italian colony. Rommel was answerable to Generale Ettore Bastico, the Governor-General of Italian Libya and also the military commander of all Axis forces in North Africa. In theory at least, all operations had to be sanctioned by the Italian Commando Supremo in Rome. In June 1941 Rommel's tactical command also included the Italian 102nd Trento Division and the garrison of the town of Bardia, modern-day El Burdi, just over 80 kilometres east of Tobruk. The town had been lost to the British in January 1941 but was retaken in April during Rommel's first offensive. At the same time Divisions-Kommando zbV Afrika (3) was established in Germany to control the infantry formations destined for North Africa.

Notes

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1. General von Funck had originally been slated to lead the German expeditionary force to Libya but was replaced by Rommel on Hitler's orders. The Führer's hatred of the aristocratic von Funck was common knowledge.

2. Two full companies of the division's Panzer-Regiment 8 would not arrive in North Africa until December 1941.

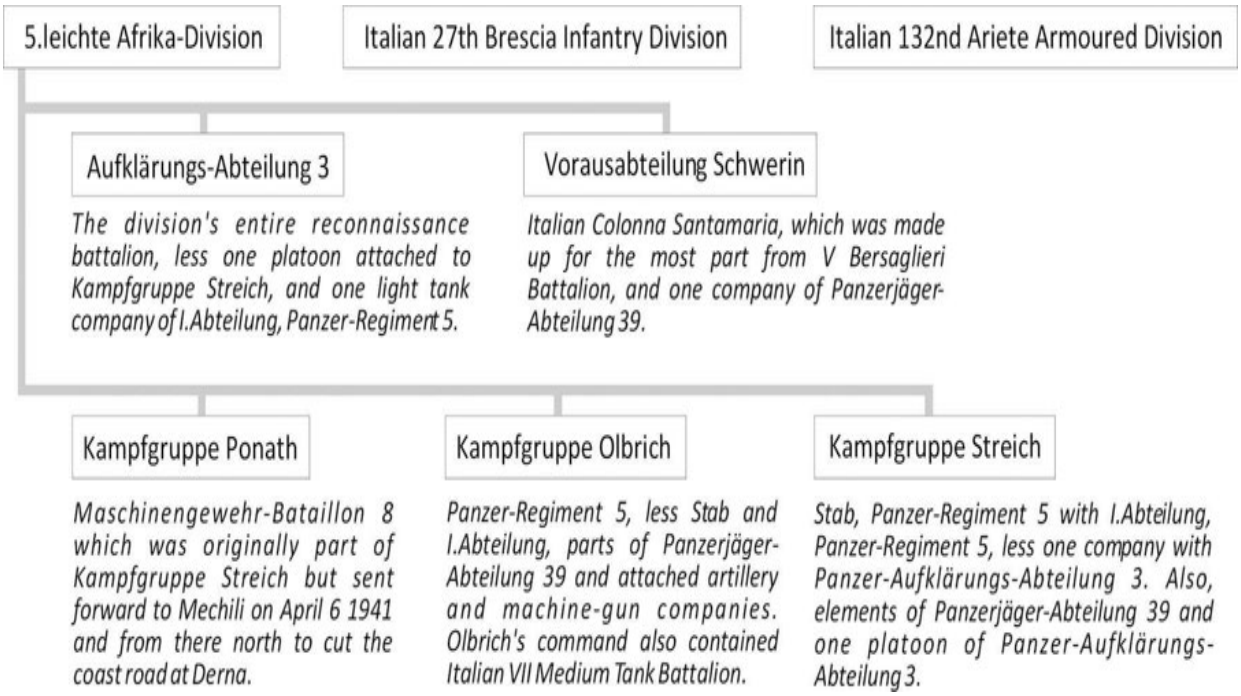
3. Zur besonderen Verwendung and zur besonderen Verfügung, both of which are abbreviated as zbV, can be translated here as being for

a special purpose or duty.

In the early hours of 22 June 1941 Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union, commenced and the pressures generated by the gargantuan battles on the Eastern Front, more than any other consideration, ensured that the German units in North Africa would have to survive on a trickle of supplies and no reinforcements until late 1942 when it was obvious that the battle had been lost.

DEUTSCHES AFRIKAKORPS, MARCH-APRIL 1941

Ignoring Berlin's clear orders to await the arrival of 15.Panzer-Division Rommel sent the tanks of 5.leichte Afrika-Division towards Mersa Brega which they captured on 31 March 1941. Encouraged by the apparent weakness of the British defences the Axis forces pushed on to Benghazi but were stopped there by a lack of fuel and ammunition. From this point the division was split into several Kampfgruppen, ad-hoc battle groups, as shown below and this would be a feature of the entire campaign. The reader should not that I have not included a number of corps-level and support units, rather focusing on the armoured elements.


5.leichte Afrika-Division
Italian 27th Brescia Infantry Division
Italian 132nd Ariete Armoured Division
Aufklärungs-Abteilung 3
The division's entire reconnaissance battalion, less one platoon attached to Kampfgruppe Streich, and one light tank company of I.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 5.
Vorausabteilung Schwerin
Italian Colonna Santamaria, which was made up for the most part from V Bersaglieri Battalion, and one company of Panzerjäger-Abteilung 39.
Kampfgruppe Ponath
Maschinengewehr-Bataillon 8 which was originally part of Kampfgruppe Streich but sent forward to Mechili on April 6 1941 and from there north to cut the coast road at Derna.
Kampfgruppe Olbrich
Panzer-Regiment 5, less Stab and I.Abteilung, parts of Panzerjäger-Abteilung 39 and attached artillery and machine-gun companies. Olbrich's command also contained Italian VII Medium Tank Battalion.
Kampfgruppe Streich
Stab, Panzer-Regiment 5 with I.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 5, less one company with Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 3. Also, elements of Panzerjäger-Abteilung 39 and one platoon of Panzer-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 3.

Notes

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1. On 1 August 1941, 21.Panzer-Division had been created by renaming 5.leichte Afrika-Division.

2. In some official documents Panzerarmee Afrika is referred to as Panzer-Armee Oberkommando Afrika.

Panzergruppe Afrika. On 1 September 1941 the DAK, by now comprised of 15.Panzer-Division, 21.Panzer-Division (1), the Italian 55th Savona Division and the units in Bardia, was combined with the newly-arrived infantry units of Divisions-Kommando zbV Afrika to create Panzergruppe Afrika.

Rommel, who had been promoted to General der Panzertruppe on 15 August, commanded the Panzergruppe which also controlled the Italian X and XXI Army Corps. The DAK was temporarily entrusted to General Philipp Müller-Gebhard until 15 September 1941 when General Ludwig Crüwell took control.

The German units were still subordinated to Generale Bastico, whoin turn reported to Commando Supremo in Rome, and the Italians referred to this formation as Gruppo Corazzato Africa.

On 27 November 1941, Divisions-Kommando zbV Afrika was renamed 90.leichte Afrika-Division. Panzer-Abteilung 190, which was initially raised for this division, never fought with its parent formation and was eventually absorbed by Panzer-Regiment 5.

During the first weeks of 1942, units of Panzergruppe Afrika conducted a successful counteroffensive, recapturing the province of Cyrenaica up to the Gazala Line and on 30 January, while the operation was still in underway, the formation was renamed Panzerarmee Afrika.

Panzerarmee Afrika. On 30 January 1942 Panzergruppe Afrika was renamed Panzerarmee Afrika. This was in line with the reorganisations taking place in Europe where the former Panzergruppen, which were in fact army-sized formations, were renamed as Panzerarmeen. Interestingly, this name change must have come at fairly short notice as the Propaganda Ministry had printed and distributed thousands of diaries entitled Panzergruppe Afrika Kalendar 1942.

Rommel retained tactical control and the establishment changed little apart from the addition of the Italian XX Army Corps and 133rd Armoured Division Littorio just prior to the Battle of Alam Halfa in August 1942. General Crüwell remained in command of the DAK until May 1942 when he was captured by the British and replaced by General Walter Nehring.

On 22 June 1942 Rommel was promoted to Generalfeldmarschall and in the following August Generale Bastico was appointed Maresciallo d'Italia, largely to avoid him being junior in rank to Rommel. On 15 August 1942, 164.leichte Afrika-Division was raised from personnel of Festungs-Division Kreta and sent to Africa, entirely by air, and attached to Panzerarmee Afrika. The division never reached its full strength and was totally reliant on captured vehicles for transportation. It was almost completely destroyed in the retreat from El Alamein in October 1942 and disbanded in early 1943.

Earlier, on 31 August 1942 General Nehring was seriously wounded in an air raid and command of the DAK was passed to General Wilhelm Ritter von Thoma (2).

Pzkpfw III tanks of 6.Kompaine, Panzer-Regiment 5 photographed after being unloaded in Tripoli. These vehicles are from the same platoon as those depicted on page 2. This image, and other photographs, show that some of the tank crews made the crossing from Italy wearing their black Panzer uniforms.

A Pzkpfw III ausf F of 6.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5 photographed in mid-1941 still painted in RAL 7021 and carrying the unit insignia of 3.Panzer-Division. Note the large metal shield over the driver's visor which identifies this model. Other photographs of this tank show that it was fitted with the early commander's cupola.

Deutsch-Italienische Panzerarmee. On 25 October 1942 Panzerarmee Afrika was renamed the Deutsch-Italienische Panzerarmee, or the German-Italian Panzer Army.

During the retreat from El Alamein this formation included the divisions of the DAK, 90.leichte Afrika-Division, the Italian corps mentioned above and the 136rd Armored Division Giovani Fascisti. Less than two weeks later, on 4 November, General von Thoma was captured by the British during the withdrawal from El Alamein and he was replaced as commander of the DAK by General Gustav Fehn who had led a Panzer corps on the Eastern Front. On 8 November 1942, as Rommel's troops withdrew to Sidi Barrani, 40 kilometres from the Libyan frontier, Allied forces landed in Morocco and Algeria as part of Operation Torch. The Germans reacted swiftly and within 24 hours men and material were being ferried and flown into Tunisia from Sicily to form a bridgehead and cover the withdrawal of Deutsch-Italienische Panzerarmee. Many of these units, including the heavy Panzer battalions with their Tiger I tanks, had in fact been promised earlier to Rommel.

German units in Tunisia were initially controlled by Organisationsstab Tunesien but on 8 December 1942, 5.Panzerarmee was formed for the defence of northern Tunisia, primarily the ports of Bizerte and Tunis, and contained 10.Panzer-Division, Division von Broich, a complete Flak division, parts of schwere Panzer-Abteilung 501 and the Italian Brigate Imperiali (1). In late 1942 and early 1943 Deutsch-Italienische Panzerarmee, fighting to hold southern Tunisia, included the remnants of 164.leichte Afrika-Division and Fallschirmjäger-Brigade Ramcke.

1st Italian Army. On 19 February 1943 Deutsch-Italienische Panzerarmee was renamed 1st Italian Army and although Rommel had been directed to hand over command to Generale Giovanni Messe as early as 23 January he took it upon himself to ignore the order, claiming that to do so would disrupt the Kasserine operations which were then underway. The appointment of Generale Messe, probably the most capable Italian commander of the war, was an acknowledgement that

Italian soldiers accounted for the majority of Axis forces in North Africa. In any case the entire front was to be reorganised within days.

Heeresgruppe Afrika. During the first week of February 1943 Libya was completely overrun by the British Commonwealth forces leaving Maresciallo d'Italia Bastico with no province to govern and technically at least, no military command. Operations would henceforth be controlled by the German commanders in the field directed by OKH in Berlin and on 22 February 1943, Heeresgruppe Afrika was created to control all the Axis forces fighting in north-west Africa (2).

Heeresgruppe Afrika was commanded by Generalfeldmarschall Rommel until 9 March 1943 when he returned to Germany and was replaced by Generaloberst Hans-Jürgen von Arnim who had led 5.Panzerarmee until that time. Earlier, in February, 21.Panzer-Division had been transferred to the direct control of 5.Panzerarmee and when the last Axis units in North Africa surrendered the DAK, now commanded by General Hans Cramer, contained the survivors of 15.Panzer-Division, 90.leichte Division and elements of 999.leichte Afrika-Division which arrived in Tunisia in the last weeks of the campaign.

Notes

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1. Both Division von Broich and Brigate Imperiali were ad-hoc infantry formations. Division von Broich was renamed Division von Manteuffel in the first week of February 1943. The heavy Panzer units which served in Tunisia are examined in Tank Craft 10: Tiger I: German

Army Heavy Tank, Southern Front 1942-1945, North Africa, Sicily and Italy.

2. Organisationsstab Tunesien had been absorbed by Deutsch-Italienische Panzerarmee in late 1942.

THE NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN 1941-1942

Our map shows the Italian provinces of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, which together formed the colony of Libya, and Egypt in 1941. Tripolitania and Cyrenaica each contained two administrative districts and, prior to the war, the southern portion of Libya was under the direct control of the military. Britain had been granted control of the Suez Canal zone by the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 and had in fact had a significant presence in the area since the Urubi Revolt of 1879 when the ruler of Egypt invited the British government to intervene. The only true highway, the Via Balbia, had been completed by the Italians in 1937 and ran from the Tunisian frontier in the west to

inside Egyptian territory in the east. The road followed the coast for its entire length and tended to dictate the movement of troops by both sides. The Qattara Depression covers an area of almost 20,000 square kilometres and is made up of soft sand dunes and salt marshes. It is largely impassable to motor transport and thus prevented Rommel from bypassing the British defensive line at El Alamein in October 1942. The following time line gives highlights the most important aspects of the fighting from early 1941 to the retreat from Egypt in late 1942. The reader should note that Commonwealth units from the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, India and South Africa took part in the fighting across Egypt and what is today western Libya. They were supported by volunteers from Poland, France, Czechoslovakia and Greece. Purely as a matter of convenience I have referred to the anti-Axis units mentioned here as British.

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11 January 1941. Führer Directive 22 is issued. Under the codename Alpine Violets, German units are made ready for deployment to North Africa and Albania if the need arises.

6 February 1941. Generalleutnant Erwin Rommel, unexpectedly recalled from leave, is instructed to proceed to the Italian colony of Libya to take command of the German troops which will arrive there over the next weeks. Two days later the first German troops leave Naples bound for Tripoli, the main port of Italian Libya.

18 February 1941. 5.Leichte-Division is officially established for operations in North Africa.

21 February 1941. The Deutsches Afrikakorps (DAK), under Rommel, is created to control all German units in North Africa. In addition a number of Italian formations are placed under Rommel's command. Offensive patrols push into Libya from Tripoli.

24 February 1943. German units come into contact with British forces for the first time west of El Agheila, modern-day Al Uqaylah. In the following days the first German tank, a Pzkpfw III, is unloaded in Tripoli.

8 March 1941. The bulk of Panzer-Regiment 5 leaves Naples in two separate convoys bound for Tripoli. By 11 March the last tanks are unloaded, paraded through the city and immediately head for Sirte.

29 March 1941. Initially held back by severe sandstorms, and ignoring advice from Berlin, Rommel pushes past El Agheila to Mersa Brega. Luftwaffe aircraft join the fighting, bombing British supply columns.

1 April 1941. The famous Afrikakorps insignia, a stylised palm tree and swastika, is introduced for use on all vehicles.

11 April 1941. The port city of Tobruk is completely surrounded and German reconnaissance units push towards Bardia, almost 80 kilometres to the east, while a Kampfgruppe is sent across the Egyptian frontier to Sollum with orders to reach Mersa Matruh.

25 April 1941. Elements of Panzer-Regiment 8 depart Naples in three separate convoys.

15 May 1941. During the early morning hours, British units capture Halfaya Pass and Fort Capuzzo but a German counterattack retakes the fort later in the day. The British units withdraw to consolidate their hold on Halfaya Pass on the Egyptian border.

26 May 1941. German units reach Halfaya Pass.

14 June 1941. The Germans detect a build-up of British tanks on the Libyan border and, assuming that a major assault is imminent, reinforce their front and the siege lines around Tobruk. As darkness falls Axis units bombard the town.

15 June 1941. The British launch Operation Battleaxe aimed at relieving Tobruk. They manage to secure Halfaya Pass and once again capture Fort Capuzzo.

16 June 1941. A series of limited German counterattacks fails to dislodge British troops from Fort Capuzzo but the related tank battles near Hafid Ridge cost the British dearly as the Pzkpfw III and Pzkpfw IV tanks display their clear superiority. Tobruk remains under siege.

17 June 1941. In a stunning counter-operation Rommel's men break through the British lines and threaten the units at Halfaya Pass with encirclement. By the afternoon the British infantry units are falling back into Egypt while the remaining tanks act as a rearguard.

22 June 1941. In Eastern Europe, almost 150 German infantry and armoured divisions push into Soviet-controlled territory as part of Operation Barbarossa. This is the largest military operation in history and will have a profound effect on the conduct of the campaign in north Africa, particularly as regards supply.

2 August 1941. An Allied attempt to retake positions lost in early May around Tobruk is unsuccessful.

17 November 1941. An attempt by British commandos to assassinate Rommel fails as the general is absent from his headquarters.

18 November 1941. The British launch Operation Crusader, the third attempt to relieve Tobruk. The successes of the first day were in no small part due to the ships of the Royal Navy which bombarded the German positions at Halfaya Pass.

21 November 1941. South-east of Tobruk, the Battle of Sidi Rezegh, a large-scale armoured engagement which lasts for three days, begins. German units are gravely hampered by a lack of fuel.

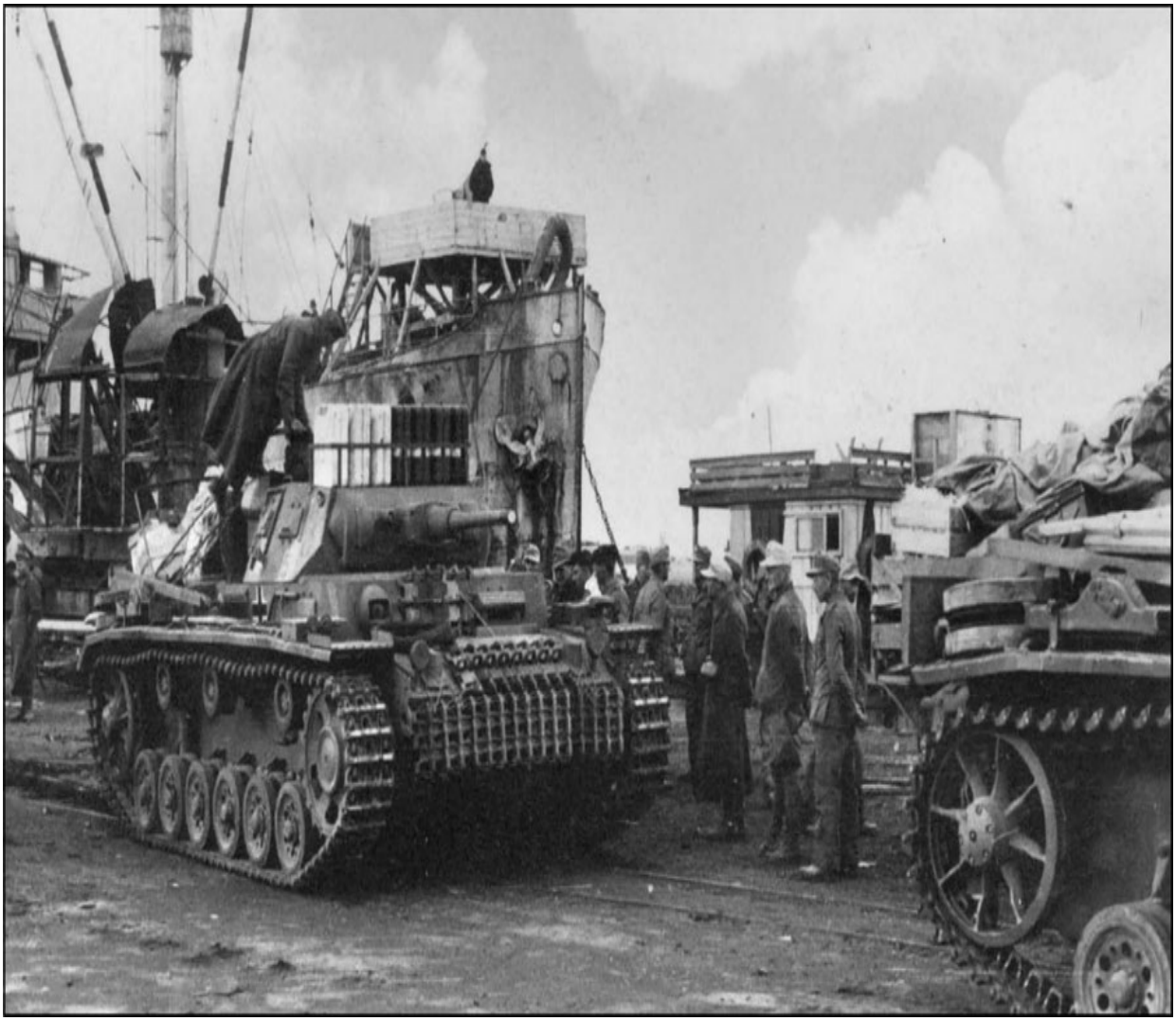
23 November 1941. In the climax to the fighting near Sidi Rezegh, German units outflank the British armoured force inflicting heavy casualties. Somewhat ironically, on this day a religious festival referred to as Totensonntag, or Sunday of the Dead, is traditionally celebrated in Germany.

26 November 1941. British tanks break into Tobruk. On the following day a counterattack made by the tanks of Panzer-Regiment 5 and Panzer-Regiment 8 is beaten back by determined infantry units.

27 November 1941. Short of all supplies, the tanks of 21.Panzer-Division withdraw to the west allowing the British to retake Sidi Rezegh. Further to the east, near the Egyptian border, elements of 15.Panzer-Division occupy Sidi Aziez, threatening Tobruk once again.

28 November 1941. A large British armoured force attempts to overwhelm 15.Panzer-Division but the Germans push relentlessly towards Tobruk. Elsewhere, the commander of 21.Panzer-Division, General Johann von Ravenstein, is taken prisoner.

Photographed during Rommel's first foray into the Libyan desert in April 1941, this Pzkpfw III ausf G of 5.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5 retains its base coat of RAL 7021 Schwartzgrau dark grey camouflage. Note the light patch above the driver's visor where the unit insignia of 3.Panzer-Division, the regiment's former parent formation, has been covered. This vehicle is fitted with the narrow Kgs.6111/380/120 tracks.



Although this image is of mediocre quality I have included it here as it shows Pzkpfw III tanks of 3.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 8 being unloaded in December 1941, an occasion that was not as well documented as the first arrivals. The company number is just visible on the turret side an the tank's number, probably 315, is partly discernable below the vision port. Note the Kugelblende machine-gun mount, an identifying feature of the Pzkpfw III ausf J, and the spare road wheel mounted on the trackguard at the rear indicating that this vehicle was built after August 1941.

1 December 1941. An attack launched by the tanks of 15.Panzer-Division on the eastern edge of the Tobruk defence perimeter almost completely destroys the New Zealand infantry battalion holding the village of Belhamed. By the following day a lack of fuel and spare parts force the Axis units to abandon the assault.

4 December 1941. With the push on Bardia and Sollum stalled, Rommel decides that all future offensive efforts will concentrate on Tobruk. But within 24 hours a drastic lack of fuel, water and ammunition necessitates a withdrawal to Gazala, 15 kilometres to the west.

10 December 1941. The siege of Tobruk is officially over. The DAK, reduced to forty operational tanks, takes up positions on the open southern flank of the Gazala defensive line.

13 December 1941. Fighting on the Gazala Line commences with heavy casualties inflicted on both sides.

15 December 1941. Rommel orders a general withdrawal with his few remaining tanks acting as a rearguard. Attempts to outflank the Axis unit at Bir Halegh to the south-west are ultimately unsuccessful.

18 December 1941. British tanks reach Mechili, present-day Al Mukhayli, but the town is too far from the main fighting to affect the German withdrawal.

22 December 1941. Axis forces begin evacuating Benghazi by sea and within days Rommel orders a withdrawal to Agedabia, east of Mersa Brega. Towards the end of the month, near Ma`tan al Husayyat, a handful of German tanks inflict a severe reverse on the British forces pushing towards Mersa Brega.

2 January 1942. Bardia falls to the British and 7,000 Axis troops pass into captivity including General Artur Schmitt, Rommel's rear area commander. Within days the Germans evacuate Agedabia.

21 January 1942. The Germans mount a strong counterattack out of El Agheila and push on to Antelat and Msus, south-west of Benghazi, capturing thirty fully-operational British Valentine tanks.

27 January 1942. A diversionary attack from Msus towards Mechili draws in the British reserves while the main German effort is directed at Benghazi.

29 January 1942. After destroying the port facilities at Benghazi the British withdraw to a defensive line running south from Gazala made up of a series of fortified 'boxes' where they manage to halt the Germans during the first week of February. Both sides pause to rest and resupply.

4 February 1942. German troops enter Derna but, low on fuel and ammunition, the DAK cannot break the Gazala Line.

26 February 1942. Prime Minister Churchill urges the British commander in Egypt, General Claude Auchinleck, to attack immediately but Auchinleck states his men will not be ready before June.

6 April 1942. The Luftwaffe bombs the port area of Alexandria.

26 May 1942. The Germans launch an assault on the Gazala Line beginning with a diversionary action near the coast which Rommel entrusts to General Ludwig Crüwell. The main attack is stalled at the old fort of Bir Hakeim, manned by Free French troops, while Crüwell's men reach El Adem.

28 May 1942. The British mount a series of counterattacks along the Gazala Line encircling the German units south of Tobruk in what becomes known as the Cauldron. Incorrectly, they believe this force to be the diversion and Crüwell's formation to be the main German effort. On the following day an Italian supply

convoy manages to reach the units in the Cauldron. Rommel orders his tanks to attack towards the west, catching the British units in the rear.

31 May 1942. As darkness falls, Rommel's Panzers smash into the British positions taking 3,000 prisoners and cutting the supply link to Bir Hakeim. The garrison commander refuses several offers of honourable surrender.

5 June 1942. British units launch a large counter-offensive in the area south of Tobruk codenamed Operation Aberdeen. The attack is called off on the following day but a number of battalions are not notified and are soon surrounded by the advancing Germans. The British withdrawal enables Rommel to reinforce the Axis units attacking Bir Hakeim.

7 June 1942. German engineers manage to clear a path through the minefields around Bir Hakeim and 15.Panzer-Division mounts an assault on the fort, supported by artillery and Stuka dive bombers, which is ultimately unsuccessful. Unknown to the Germans the garrison's commander has determined that the fort will have to be abandoned.

11 June 1942. The last defenders depart Bir Hakeim leaving Rommel free to push past El Adem. At 7.00pm German and British tanks exchange sporadic fire but no significant action ensues.

13 June 1942. A German assault on the Gazala Line near Tobruk, at a position codenamed Knightsbridge, succeeds in cutting off the defenders and threatens to outflank the line. The next day all British units fall back into Egypt and, as the Axis troops pursue them, Tobruk is once again surrounded.

20 June 1942. At 5.30am German and Italian troops, supported by 100 tanks, launch an attack on Tobruk from the south-east. Within hours the defences are breached and by 7.00pm the port facilities are secured. An attempt to break out early the following morning fails and by 8.00am the garrison has formally surrendered. Hitler promotes Rommel to Generalfeldmarschall.

23 June 1942. Axis units cross the Egyptian frontier and push on towards Mersa Matruh, brushing aside elements of British 7th Armoured Division at Sollum. Despite round-the-clock bombing missions flown by the RAF, Italian troops enter Mersa Matruh on the following day while German tanks sweep through the desert toward Minqar Qaim, 25 kilometres to the south.

27 June 1942. In some confusion British units begin to fall back to Fuka. But they are outmanoeuvred by 90.leichte-Division which captures Sidi Abdel Rahman, almost 70 kilometres further east, and withdraw to El Alamein.

1 July 1942. Led by 90.leichte-Division the Germans advance towards El Alamein and despite heavy casualties maintain the offensive. On the following day the tanks of Panzer-Regiment 5 and Panzer-Regiment 8 are moved to the northern edge of the front and join the attack.

3 July 1942. German and Italian armoured units attack Ruweisat Ridge but make little headway and with 48 hours are forced to halt due to a lack of fuel.

10 July 1942. British units capture Tel el Eisa and Tel el Makh Khad and beat back a counterattack mounted by elements of 15.Panzer-Division. The positions of Nachrichten Fernaufklärungskompanie 621, the DAK radio interception unit, are overrun and most of its personnel killed. This simple action will deprive Rommel of vital intelligence in the coming battle.

13 July 1942. Tanks of Panzer-Regiment 8 attack Tel el Eisa ridge driving back the British defenders.

14 July 1942. Under cover of darkness British units launch an assault on Ruweisat Ridge. Although they force the withdrawal of two Italian infantry divisions they are unaware that they have bypassed the German armour which mounts an attack the next day.

17 July 1942. British units attack along Miteirya Ridge between Tel el Eisa but are ultimately driven back by German tanks and an Italian infantry formation.

21 July 1942. The British launch an offensive south of Ruweisat Ridge and gain several key positions. But the promised armour

support is bogged down in a minefield and is almost completely wiped out by German tanks on the following day.

This Pzkpfw III ausf G of 6.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5 is fitted with the older-style commander's cupola, drive sprocket and rear idler. Although various dates have been given for this image, photographs from the collection of Oberleutnant Hans Sandrock, the company commander, would suggest it was taken during the late summer of 1941. The DAK unit insignia of a stylised palm with a swastika is just visible on the hull side below the number 6.

The caption of this official wartime photograph gives the location as north of Rotunda Segnali, a roundabout built by the Italians at the junction of two desert tracks about 44 kilometres west of Gazala, modern-day Uyun al Ghazalah, and the date as 24 April 1942. This Pzkpfw III ausf J of 7.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 8 is probably one of the company headquarters vehicles although it is not a purpose-built Befehlspanzer as the caption states. Note the number 7 on the

turret side and the name BESTIE in front of the vision port on the hull. This tank is also depicted in the Camouflage & Markings section on page 25.

27 July 1942. A follow-up attack at Miteirya Ridge meets with early success but once again British armoured units fail to arrive on time and a German counterattack inflicts heavy casualties on the exposed forward positions at Deir el Dhib and at Ruweisat Ridge. This action marks the end of the First Battle of El Alamein.

30 August 1942. The Axis forces begin their final attempt to break through at El Alamein. In what is later referred to as the Battle of Alam Halfa, the tanks of 15. Panzer-Division fail to penetrate the British lines and sustain heavy casualties including the total destruction of thirty tanks.

1 September 1942. RAF bombers successfully attack the Axis supply lines between Benghazi and Tobruk. On the following day a British armoured car unit penetrates the Axis front at Himeimat near Alam el Halfa and destroys fifty-seven German supply trucks. The negative effects of these actions are immediate as some German and Italian tank units are immobilised due to a complete lack of fuel and Rommel decides that he has no choice but to withdraw. Although a number of large commando-style raids are undertaken in September the British, now commanded by Lieutenant-General Bernard Montgomery, spend most of this time preparing for a major offensive. Rommel, suffering from a liver infection and physically exhausted, returns to Germany and is replaced by General Georg Stumme.

23 October 1942. British infantry and armoured units launch a major assault, codenamed Operation Lightfoot, from their positions between El Alamein and the northern edge of the Qattara Depression. Massive air raids are conducted in the Axis rear areas denying the German and Italian units supplies of ammunition and fuel.

24 October 1942. General Stumme falls from his car during a reconnaissance of British positions at El Alamein and suffers a fatal heart attack. He is temporarily replaced by General Wilhelm von Thoma as Rommel races back to North Africa.

25 October 1942. The British northern flank is reinforced by a complete armoured corps, forcing Rommel, now back in command, to commit his last reserves.

30 October 1942. Axis units on the El Alamein front report that about 320 tanks are fully operational but they have little fuel. That night the British launch a diversionary attack at Point 29, a small hill south-west of Tel el Eisa, which is countered by the tanks of Panzer-Regiment 8 throughout the next day.

2 November 1942. The British launch Operation Supercharge, destroying many Axis tanks and guns in the first hours. German counterattacks, which begin at 11.00am, fail to stop the advance. That night Rommel requests permission from Hitler to fall back but the Führer forbids any retreat.

4 November 1942. As some Axis units are pushed back to Fuka, and the Italian Ariete Division loses its last tank, Rommel decides to disobey Hitler and gives the order for a general withdraw toward the Libyan border, leaving a strong anti-tank screen as a rearguard.

8 November 1942. Allied forces land in Morocco and Algeria as part of Operation Torch. On the same day Rommel's troops reach Sidi Barrani, 40 kilometres from the Libyan frontier.

10 November 1942. Allied units push into Tunisia. By the following day the last Axis soldiers leave Egyptian territory.

The presence of Oberst Hans Cramer, the officer standing in the cupola of this Panzerbefehlswagen III ausf H command tank, identifies this unit as Stab, Panzer-Regiment 8 and dates our photograph to some time between September 1941 and March 1942 when Oberst Cramer commanded the regiment. Note the radio antenna frame on the rear deck, a distinctive feature of these command vehicles. Note also the large red letter R on the turret side and the Afrikakorps insignia on the hull front. Most, if not all, tanks were fitted with racks to carry containers of fuel or water, as shown here, and brackets for an additional rack can be seen on the turret roof. The command pennant, in the national colours of black-white-red, is almost identical to that carried by the Panzer-Regiment 8 Pzkpfw III ausfJ tank shown on page 12.

THE PZKPFW III UNITS

Between March 1941 and May 1943 the German military force in North Africa grew from the strength of a weak division to that of an army-sized formation, complete with independent heavy Panzer battalions (1), supported by a sizeable Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine presence. Listed below are the units which operated the Pzkpfw III tank up to late October 1942 when the Second Battle of El Alamein began.

Panzer-Regiment 5. Raised in October 1935, the regiment was attached to 3. Panzer-Division and took part in the invasion of Poland as part of Panzer-Brigade 3 and later fought in the 1940 battles on the Western Front. On 15 February 1941 the regiment was subordinated to the newly-created 5.leichte Afrika-Division, a formation specifically raised for service in the tropics.

Just six days later the division's commander, Generalleutnant Johannes Streich, was advised that his men would eventually be joined by 15.Panzer-Division and that the German expeditionary force would be referred to as the Deutsches Afrikakorps (DAK). German ground forces in Libya would be under the tactical command of Generalleutnant Erwin Rommel, a favourite of Hitler.

On 28 February the regiment's tanks left Wünsdorf in Germany by rail and arrived in Naples during the first week of March where they were loaded onto transports for shipment to Libya. On Friday, 7 March 1941, while the freighter Leverkusen was being loaded, a Pzkpfw III

tank was accidentally dropped into the ship's hold causing a fire which resulted in the loss of ten Pzkpfw III and three Pzkpfw IV tanks (2).

By the following Monday the remainder of the regiment, consisting of twenty-five Pzkpfw I, forty-five Pzkpfw II, sixty-one Pzkpfw III and seventeen Pzkpfw IV tanks had been safely unloaded in Tripoli, the capital city of Italian Libya. The tanks were accompanied by seven purpose-built Panzerbefehlswagen command vehicles. Advance elements of the division, principally Aufklärungs-Abteilung 3 and Panzerjäger-Abteilung 39, had been pushed towards the east in late February and on 12 March 1941, after a parade through the streets of Tripoli, the tanks of Panzer-Regiment 3 were also sent to the front.

The regiment went into action for the first time at Mersa Brega, south-west of Benghazi on the Gulf of Sirte, on 31 March 1941 claiming the destruction of over twenty British tanks and pushing on to the outskirts of Tobruk. Although impressive, the German advance was not without cost and almost all vehicles had suffered some kind of mechanical damage with just twenty-five operational tanks taking part in the first assault against the Tobruk fortifications on 11 April (3).

Notes

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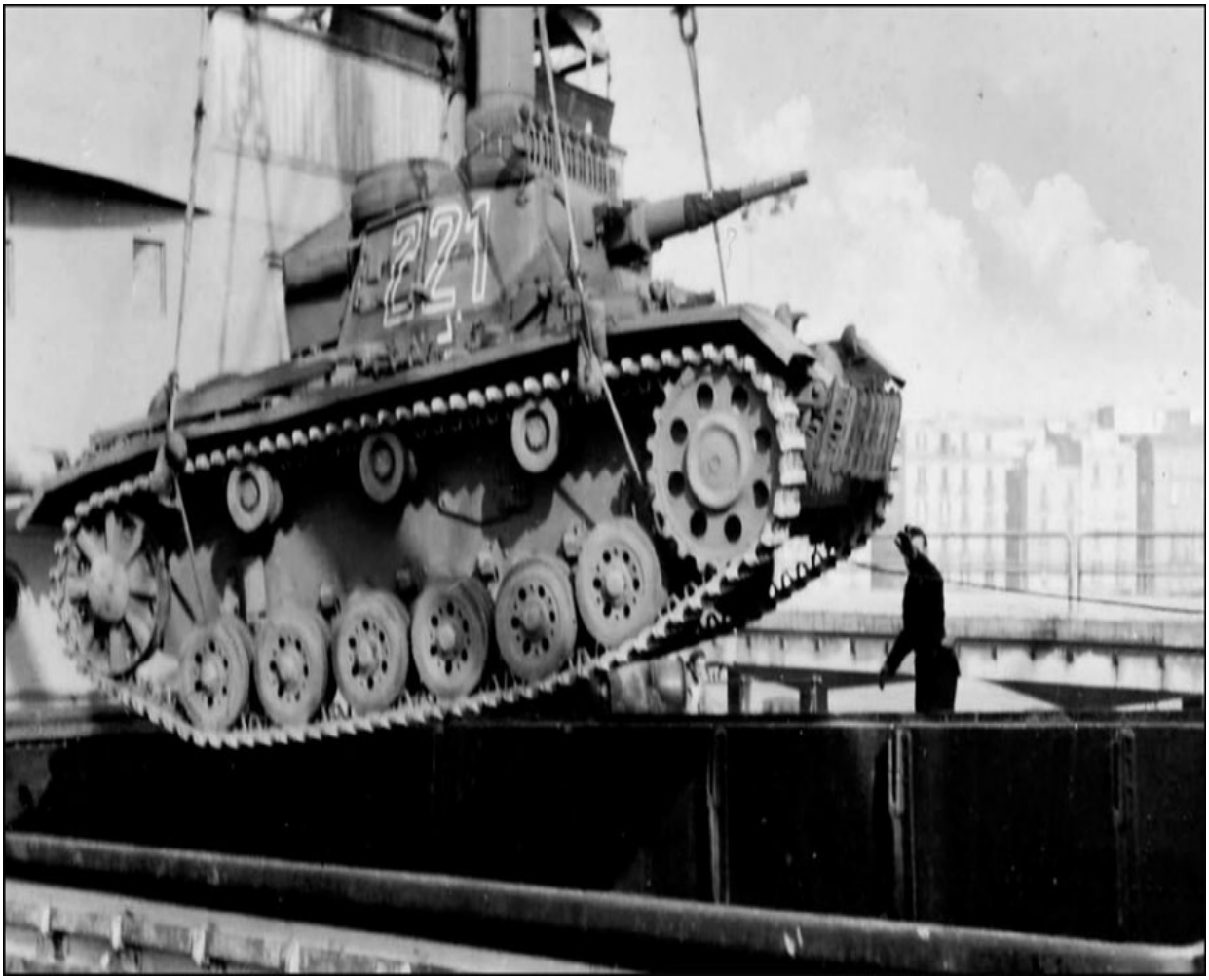
1. The story of the Tiger units which operated in the Mediterannean is covered in TankCraft 10: Tiger I German Army Heavy Tank Southern Front 1942-1945, North Africa, Sicily and Italy.

2. I believe that the vehicle that was dropped was Pzkpfw III number 215 of 2. Kompanie. A profile and photograph can be seen on page

18. This incident is further explained on page 62.

3. Most engine problems were caused by the lack of suitable sand filters.

The regiment was held back during the subsequent British counterattack in June but was thrown into the defence later in the same month and had by that time been joined by elements of Panzer-Regiment 8. In a single day, 16 June 1941, the Panzers, supported by the guns of Flak-Regiment 33, destroyed ninety-four British tanks for the loss of two Pzkpfw II and two Pzkpfw III tanks.



A Pzkpfw III ausf G of 2.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5 photographed in Naples in February 1941. Most of the regiment's tanks had fuel containers strapped to the turret at this time. Note jack, tool box and spare track links on the trackguard.

Replacements arrived in August and October 1941 in the shape of four Pzkpfw II, twenty-five Pzkpfw III and five Pzkpfw IV tanks but due to the length of the supply line through the Libyan desert the first of these only reached the regiment in January 1942. Earlier, in September, the regiment's third and seventh companies had been created but it was not anticipated that these would arrive in Libya before December.

A major British offensive, codenamed Operation Crusader, was launched on 18 November 1941 and the regiment reported on that day that thirty-five Pzkpfw II, sixty-eight Pzkpfw III and seventeen Pzkpfw IV tanks were on hand (1).

In the fierce and confused fighting that followed, particularly around Belhamed, Abiar el Amar and Sidi Rezegh, the regiment was gradually reduced to an operational strength of eighteen Pzkpfw II, twenty-six Pzkpfw III and seven Pzkpfw IV tanks. On at least two occasion the Germans had expended their last rounds of ammunition and on 23 November 1941, as darkness fell, the regiment reported that its tanks had no fuel and were forced to fight a night action from static positions. In addition to the material losses the regiment suffered a large number of casualties during these battles including Oberstleutnant Friedrich Stephan who had commanded the regiment since the previous July (2).

Despite these difficulties the Germans were once again able to cut off Tobruk but a successful British attack at El Adem threatened Panzergruppe Afrika with encirclement and on 7 December Rommel ordered a general retreat towards Gazala.

On 13 December 1941 the Italian transport ships, Carlo del Greco and Fabio Filzi, carrying the regiment's 3.Kompanie and 7.Kompanie to North Africa were both sunk and their cargoes of eleven Pzkpfw II and thirty-four Pzkpfw III tanks were lost. The few tanks left to the two Panzer regiments fought to hold the Gazala positions until the night of 16 December when they were able to slip away, completely unnoticed, to the area around Mechili, some 75 kilometres to the west and from there to Agedabia. On the last day of 1941 the regiment reported that eight tanks of all types were available for deployment and with 48 hours Agedabia was abandoned and the Axis units fell back to El Agheila.

In the first months of the new year reinforcements arrived including the first example of the Pzkpfw III armed with the 5cm L/60 main gun and replacements for the 3.Kompanie and 7.Kompanie tanks lost in December. In fact, the British had greatly underestimated Rommel's strength and what began as a reconnaissance in force very quickly developed into an offensive which pushed the defenders out of Benghazi and back to the Gazala Line and the fort of Bir Hakeim by the first week of February. Both sides took stock and on 26 May 1942 the Germans launched an assault on the Gazala defences aimed at pushing through and capturing Tobruk. On the eve of the battle Panzer-Regiment 5 reported that twenty-nine Pzkpfw II, 122 Pzkpfw III (3) and nineteen Pzkpfw IV tanks were on hand.

On 21 June 1942 the garrison of Tobruk surrendered and Rommel's forces, by now renamed Panzerarmee Afrika, pushed into Egypt. The

regiment was involved in the advance to Mersa Matruh and the First Battle of El Alamein which continued for much of July 1942. On 30 August Rommel launch an attack on the defences around Alam Halfa in an attempt to envelop and destroy the British units blocking the way into Egypt. Codenamed Operation Brandnung, this was to be the last major Axis offensive of the Western Desert campaign and on the day the assault began Panzer-Regiment 5 could field fourteen Pzkpfw II, eighty-nine Pzkpfw III and twenty-one Pzkpfw IV tanks (4).

From the very first hours of the attack the Axis formations were hammered by the squadrons of the Desert Air Force and by 5 September, paralysed by a lack of fuel and under constant bombardment, they were back to their starting positions. Both sides now prepared for the next battle.

Panzer-Regiment 8. Formed in October 1936, the regiment was originally attached to 3.Panzer-Division but transferred to 10.Panzer-Division on 1 September 1939, the day Germany invaded Poland. On 18 January 1941 the regiment was subordinated to 15.Panzer-Division and began preparing for operations in North Africa.

By the first week of February parts of the Panzer regiment were assembled in Schwetzingen in western Germany and began to receive shipments of Pzkpfw III and Pzkpfw IV tanks. The former were all equipped with the 5cm gun and the earlier models armed with the 3.7cm weapon were all relinquished.

The tanks left Schwetzingen by rail on Friday, 11 April 1941 and the first elements arrived in Naples during the evening of the following Sunday. No sooner had the tanks of 1.Kompanie been loaded onto

transport ships than they were unloaded to have their RAL 7021 Schwartzgrau camouflage replaced by what was referred to as ‘camouflage of the desert’, presumably RAL 8000 Gelbbraun (5).

Notes

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1. These were supported by four Panzerbefehlswagen command vehicles which were described as ‘large’ suggesting that they were the Pzkpfw III versions.

2. The regiment’s original commander, Oberst Herbert Olbrich, had been sacked by Rommel in late April 1941 and temporarily replaced by Major Hohmann, who led I. Abteilung. Oberstleutnant Stephan took command on 1 July but was mortally wounded in an air attack on 25 November 1941 and replaced by Major Werner Mildebrath.

3. Fifteen of the Pzkpfw III tanks were equipped with the 5cm L/60 gun.

4. A total of thirty-nine Pzkpfw III were armed with the 5cm L/60 gun while fourteen of the Pzkpfw IV vehicles had the long-barrelled KwK 40 L/43 weapon.

5. The photograph reproduced on page 52 may show these vehicles.

The tanks of the Panzer regiment began arriving in Libya on 25 April and a total of forty-five Pzkpfw II, seventy-one Pzkpfw III and twenty Pzkpfw IV tanks had been unloaded by 6 May 1941. In addition the regiment had six Panzerbefehlswagen III and three Panzerbefehlswagen I command tanks. Each battalion contained three companies numbered 1, 2 and 3 for I. Abteilung and 5, 6 and 7

for II.Abteilung. Soon after arrival, 3.Kompanie and 7.Kompanie were renumbered as 4 and 8 (1).

Notes

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1. This change may not have taken place until after July 1941. As it only affected the regiment's Pzkpfw IV companies it need not concern us here but will be covered in a future volume. Although many sources suggest that four Panzerbefehlswagen I command vehicles were on hand, the shipping manifests state clearly that one of the 24 April deliveries went to Artillerie-Regiment 33.

2. On 15 June 1941, Kümmel organised a counterattack west of Capuzzo on his own initiative which halted the advance of a large British armoured force. For his actions he was awared the Ritterkreuz, one of just six soldiers of the regiment to receive the award.

3. The numbers of demolition vehicle varies in some accounts but all agree that three Pzkpfw III tanks were on hand.

On 15 September 1941 the formation of two new light companies began but these would not arrive in North Africa until mid-December 1941.

The first elements of the regiment arrived at the front in early May and were positioned around Acroma when a major British assault, codenamed Operation Brevity, was launched which pushed the Axis units out of Halfaya Pass and advanced as far as Musaid and Capuzzo. Ordered to counterattack, the regiment was held up due to

fuel shortages but did take part in the pursuit of the retreating British units to Halfaya and I.Abteilung, commanded by Hauptmann Johannes Kümmel, took part in subsequent attacks to eject the British from the Halfaya Pass (2).

The regiment was engaged in the battles north of Fort Capuzzo in June 1941 and captured seven Mk II Matilda Infantry Tanks in running order which they operated for some time. The remainder of the summer was largely uneventful except for an incursion into Egyptian territory made by the units of 21.Panzer-Division.

As the Axis forces were preparing for an assault to capture Tobruk, a British attack on Fort Maddalena, about 80 kilometres south of Sidi Omar, heralded the start of Operation Crusader and the battles fought through northern Cyrenaica saw the first instances of the two Panzer divisions operating as a unified force. When the Germans finally withdrew to El Agheila the regiment reported that fifty Pzkpfw III and seventeen Pzkpfw IV tanks were available for deployment. Of the light tanks just thirty-three of the Pzkpfw II vehicles remained.

During 1942 the regiment took part in the operations mentioned in the brief history of Panzer-Regiment 5 set out above, including the assault on the Gazala Line, the capture of Tobruk, the battle of Alam Halfa and Operation Brandnung. It is not necessary to repeat the descriptions here except to mention that on the eve of the Second Battle of El Alamein the regiment was equipped with fourteen Pzkpfw II, eighteen Pzkpfw IV and eighty-seven Pzkpfw III tanks. Of the latter forty-four were armed with the 5cm L/60 gun.

Versuchs-Kommando (FL) Tropen. Formed in June 1942, this company-sized unit arrived in North Africa in the following

September and was equipped with twenty Borgward BIV and twenty-four Sdkfz 302 Goliath remotely-controlled demolition vehicles with three specially-adapted Pzkpfw III ausf J tanks (3).

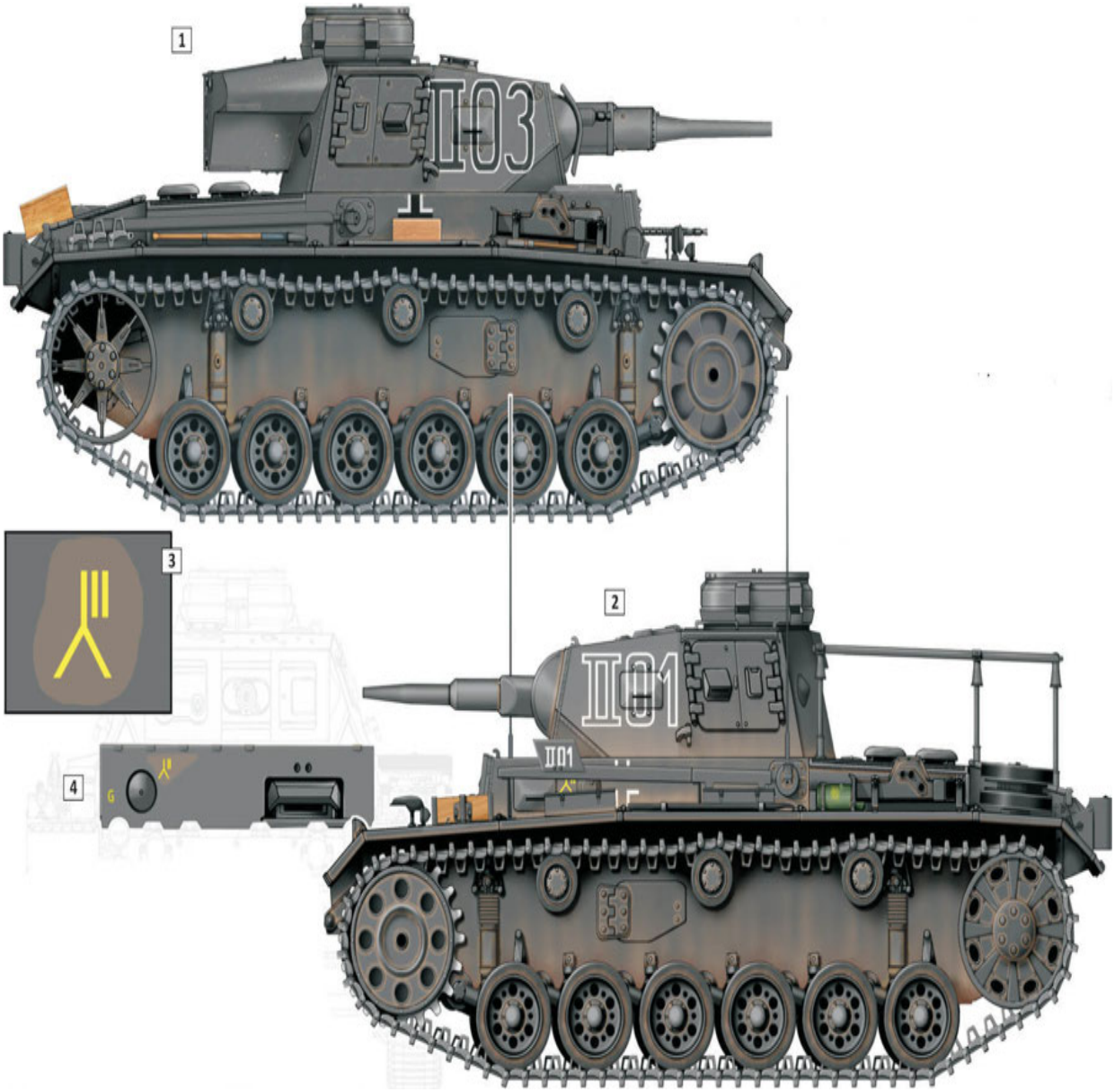
The company was attached to the Nachricten-Abteilung of 90.leichte Afrika-Division but tests showed that the demolition vehicles were not suitable for the flat desert conditions with the radio receivers being subject to interference from any transmitters within range. The Pzkpfw III tanks were relegated to supply convoy escort duties and in November 1942 the demolition vehicles were destroyed, after any useable equipment was removed. The unit's personnel returned to Germany in January 1943 and the three tanks were eventually attached to Kampfstaffel DAK, an ad-hoc unit.

PANZER-REGIMENT 8, APRIL 1941

	Convoy 22.				*Convoy 23*				*Convoy 24*			
	Departed Naples 02:30 21 April 1941				*Departed Naples 23:00 24 April 1941*				*Departed Naples 01:15 4 May 1941*			
	Arrived Tripoli 17:00 24 April 1941				*Arrived Tripoli 09:30 1 May 1941 (unloaded 2 May)*				*Arrived Tripoli 20:45 5 May 1941 (unloaded 6 May)*			
Unit	BefPzWg I	Panzer II	Panzer III	Panzer IV	BefPzWg I	Panzer II	Panzer III	Panzer IV	BefPzWg I	Panzer II	Panzer III	Panzer IV
Stab		2	1									
Panzer-Regiment		2	1									
					2	2	2					
						3	1					
Stab, I.Abteilung		2										
1.Kompanie		3	9									
		2	8									
2.Kompanie						3	8					
						2	9					
3.Kompanie						1		2				
						1		3				
						2		3				
						1		2				
Stab, II.Abteilung										3	2	
									1	2	2	
5.Kompanie						3	8					
						2	9					
6.Kompanie										2	9	
										3	8	
7.Kompanie										2		5
										3		5

The first ships carrying the units of 15.Panzer-Division to North Africa sailed from Naples on Friday, 11 April 1941 in Convoy 19 and arrived at Tripoli on the following Monday without incident. But the ships of Convoy 20 were attacked during the afternoon of 16 April 1941, after they had been at sea for three days, and all were sunk. On board were many of the 15.Panzer-Division headquarters staff and elements of the division's artillery regiment. In all twenty-eight officers and 315 men were lost in addition to all their vehicles and equipment. The chart above shows initial tank deliveries for the division's Panzer-Regiment 8.

CAMOUFLAGE & MARKINGS

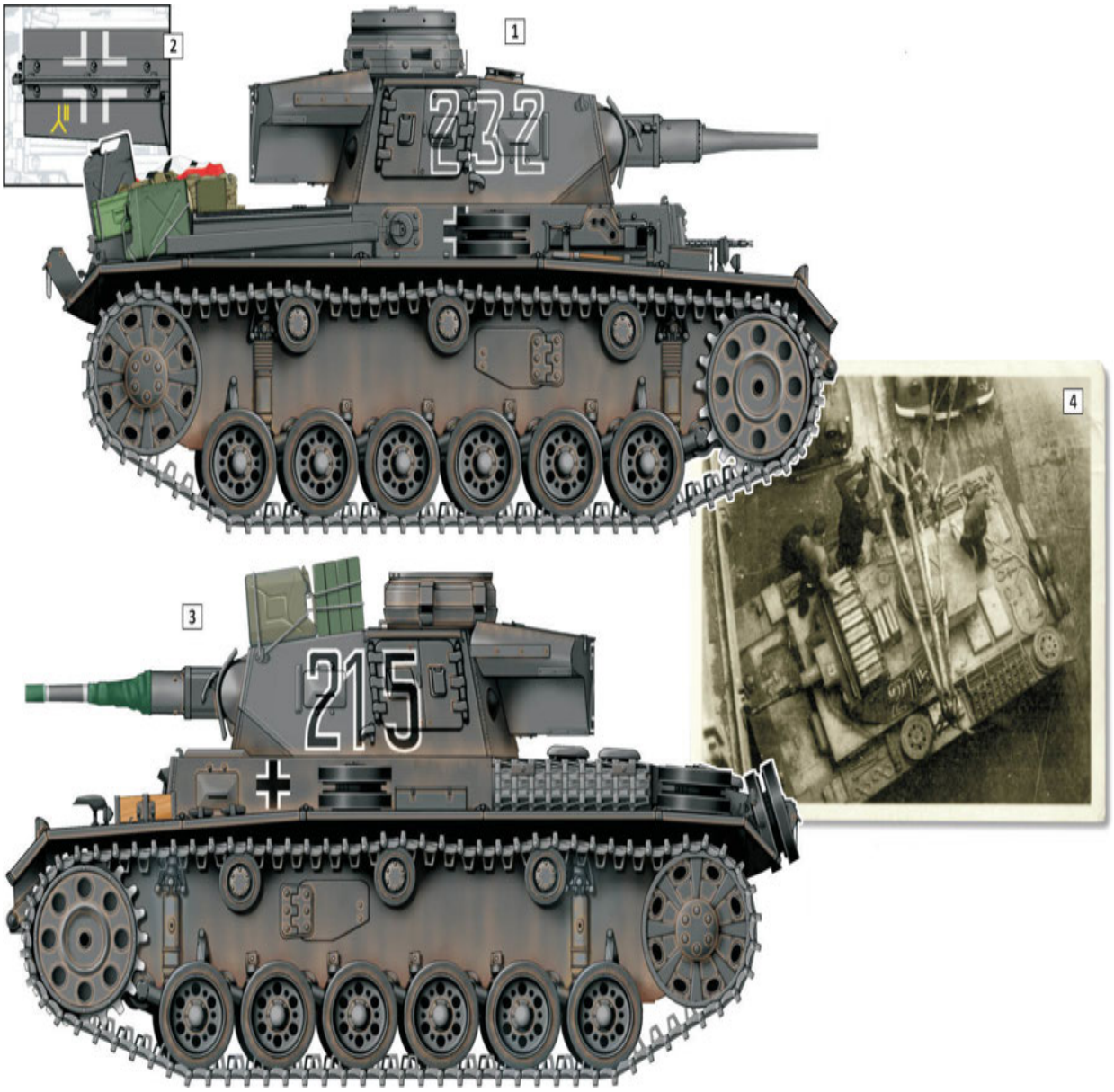


1. Pzkpfw III ausf H. Stab, II.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 5. Libya, spring 1941. Photographed during the parade through the streets of Tripoli, this vehicle of II.Abteilung headquarters has a

noticeably dark centre to the turret number, rendered here as black. A photograph of this tank and an explanation of the style of numbers and colours used can be found on page 59. Note that the fire extinguisher, jack and wooden jack block have been moved to the right side track guard and three spare track links are carried behind the antenna trough. This vehicle was also fitted with the nine spare track links on the left side trackguard as shown in the illustrations on the following pages. All the tanks of Panzer-Regiment 5 were painted in RAL 7021 Schwartzgrau when they arrived in North Africa.

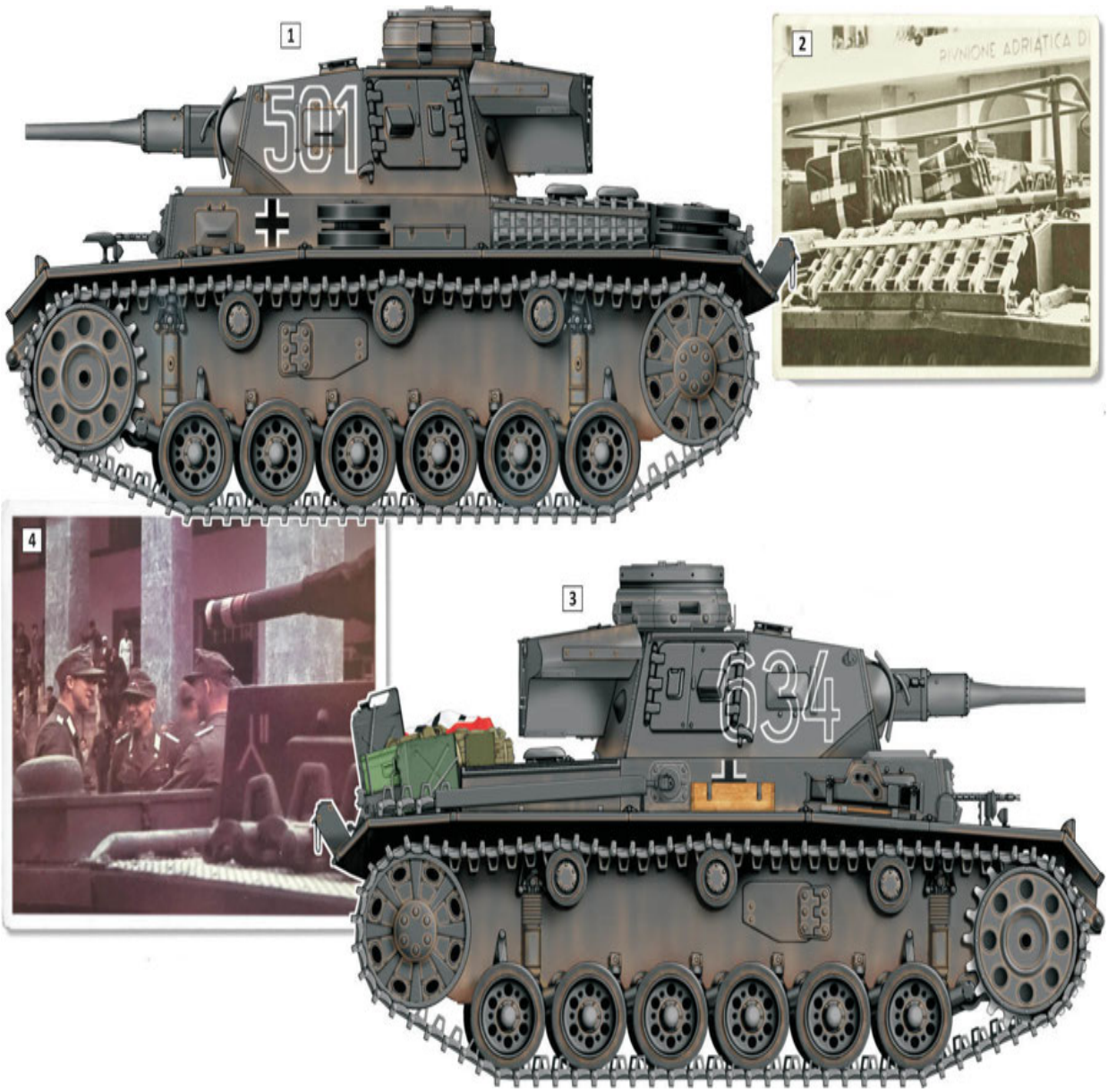
2. Panzerbefehlswagen III ausf H. Stab, II.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 5. Libya, spring 1941. Also photographed in Tripoli, this tank was unusual in having the nine spare track links fitted to the right side trackguard. Note that the turret number ii01 is repeated on the small detachable Panzer rhomboid bolted to the antenna trough. Most, if not all, tanks of this regiment still carried the unit insignia of 3.Panzer-Division (3) on the front plate, sides and hull rear although the exact position could vary.

The four command tanks of this regiment were all marked with a letter G on the front plate (4) and the style and colour varied. I can offer no explanation as to the significance of this marking but it was present on at least one of the the two vehicles attached to the regimental headquarters while the unit was still in France. Note the light patch behind the unit insignia which I have rendered as Dunkelbraun 45. In one photograph of tank ii01 a Fahrgestelle or chassis number is faintly visible at the centre of the front plate but it is, unfortunately, largely indiscernible.



1. Pzkpfw III ausf G. 2.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5. Libya, spring 1941. This tank, and another from the regiment's 6.Kompanie, were the first Pzkpfw III vehicles to arrive in North Africa with Versuchs-Kommando PR 5 at the end of February 1941. Note the jack, toolbox and spare road wheel on the right side trackguard. Note also the very unusual style used to render the turret number. The unit insignia of 3.Panzer-Division was carried on the hull rear plate (2) but was often obscured by spare road wheels as can be seen in the illustration below.

3. Pzkpfw III ausf H. 2.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5. Libya, spring 1941. This tank is almost certainly the Pzkpfw III that was dropped while being loaded onto the freighter Leverkusen in Naples, just minutes after our photograph (4) was taken, causing a fire which resulted in the loss of several vehicles. The very dark centre of the turret number is also visible in this image. The jack and fire extinguisher were replaced on the left side by nine spare track links as shown here. The type of brackets used to hold these in place varied and another example is depicted on the following page.



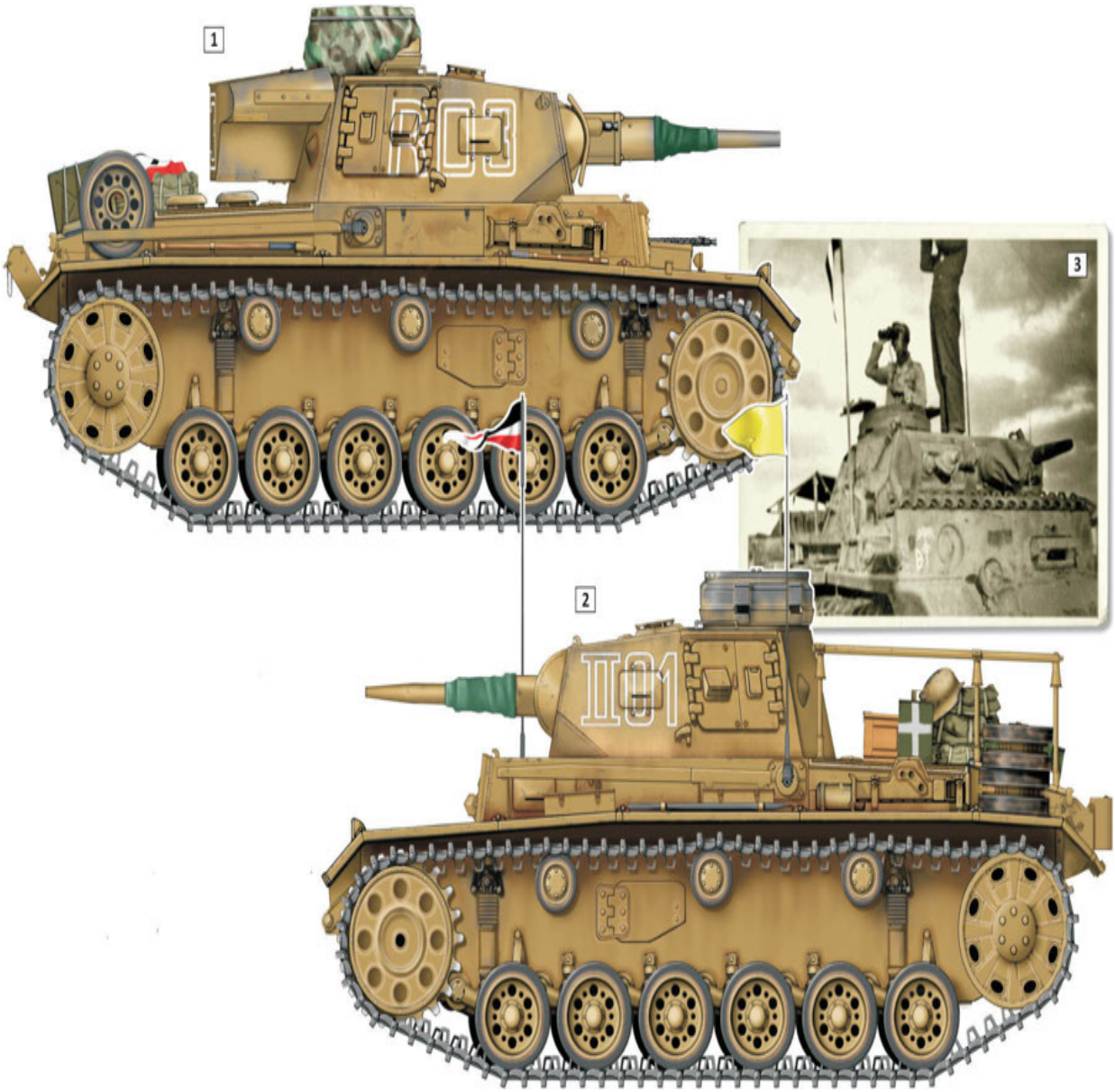
1. Pzkpfw III ausf H. 5-Kompanle, Panzer-Regiment 5. Libya, spring 1941. Note the method of holding the nine spare track links in place on the hull side. These links were usually fitted to the left side trackguard but at least Befehlspanzerwagen 1101, depicted on page 17 and shown in our photograph (2), had them on the right side.

3. Pzkpfw III ausf G. 6.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5. Libya, spring 1941. As with almost all tanks of this regiment the fire extinguisher and jack have been moved to the right side trackguard.

Our photograph (4) shows tank 601, the company commanders vehicle, and proves that this company at least depicted the unit insignia in the salmon pink colour that identified Panzer troops. The three spare track links may have been a unique feature of this tank.

1. Pzkpfw III ausf F. 2.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5. Libya, summer 1941. Within weeks of their arrival in North Africa most tanks had received a coat of RAL 8000 Gelbbraun camouflage although many featured the rather patchy appearance evident here. Note that the turret number, repeated on the Panzer rhomboid on the hull side, has been painted over and replaced by the large number 2 indicating the company on the turret doors.

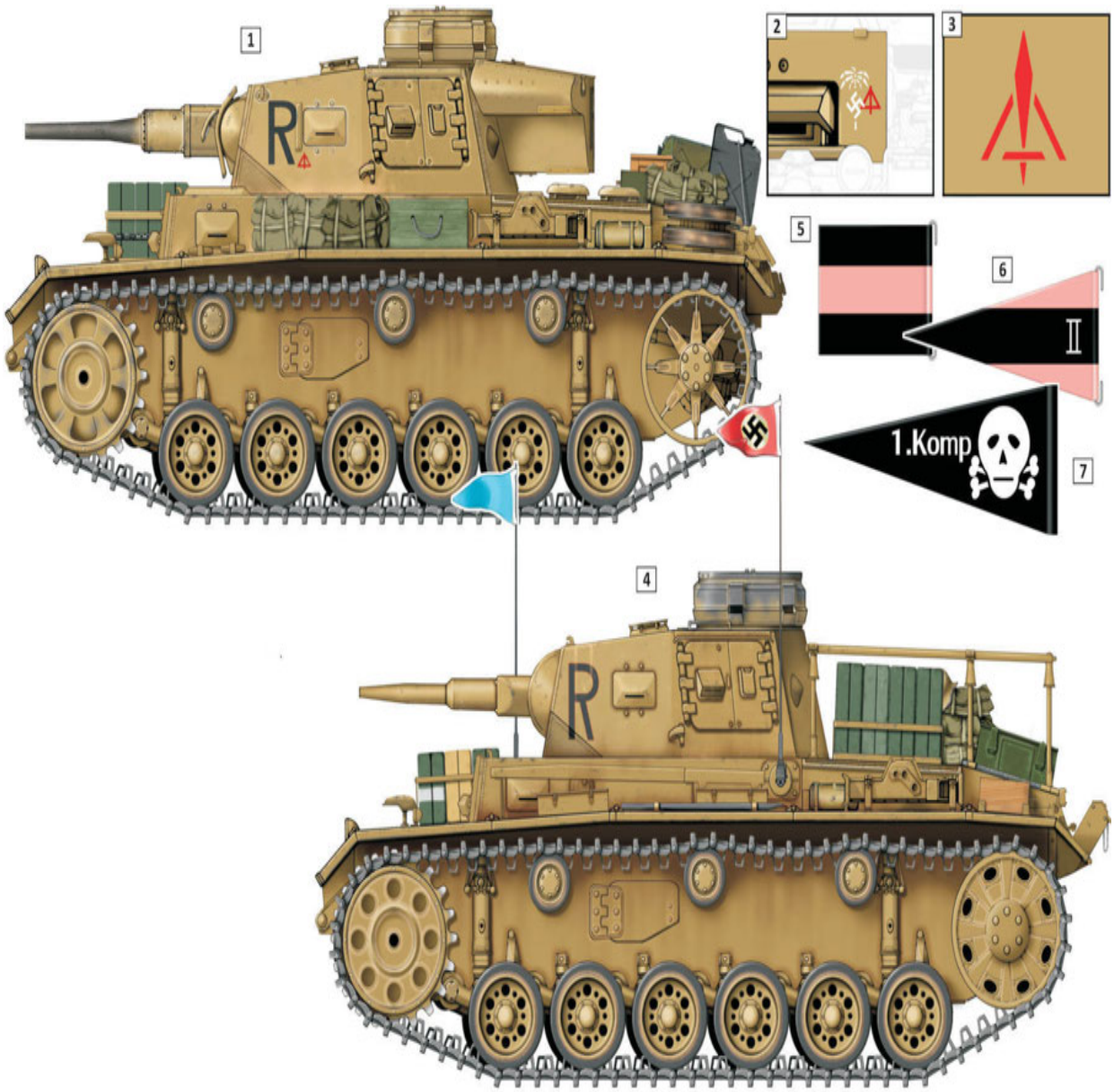
2. Pzkpfw III ausf G. 6.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5. Libya, summer 1941. As supplies of paint became available the tank crews were able to achieve a much more uniform look. Most, but not all, the tanks of this company featured turret numbers that retained their Schwartzgrau centres and our photograph (3) shows further examples, destroyed in the fighting near Tobruk in late 1941. Note the Afrikakorps insignia on the hull side. The colours used to depict this are discussed in the Technical Details and Modifications section of this book and variations on the style are shown here (4 and 5).



1. Pzkpfw III ausf G. Stab, Panzer-Regiment 5. Libya, autumn 1941. The regimental headquarters was outfitted with two Panzerbefehlswagen purpose-built command tanks and the Pzkpfw III gun tank shown here. The command vehicles were numbered as R01 and R02. Although this Pzkpfw III is an early production model it is fitted with the later commander's cupola and the hull has the forward return roller moved towards the front shock absorber mount. Dust was a constant problem in the

desert and the crew of this tank have covered the commander's cupola with a Zeltbahn tent quarter.

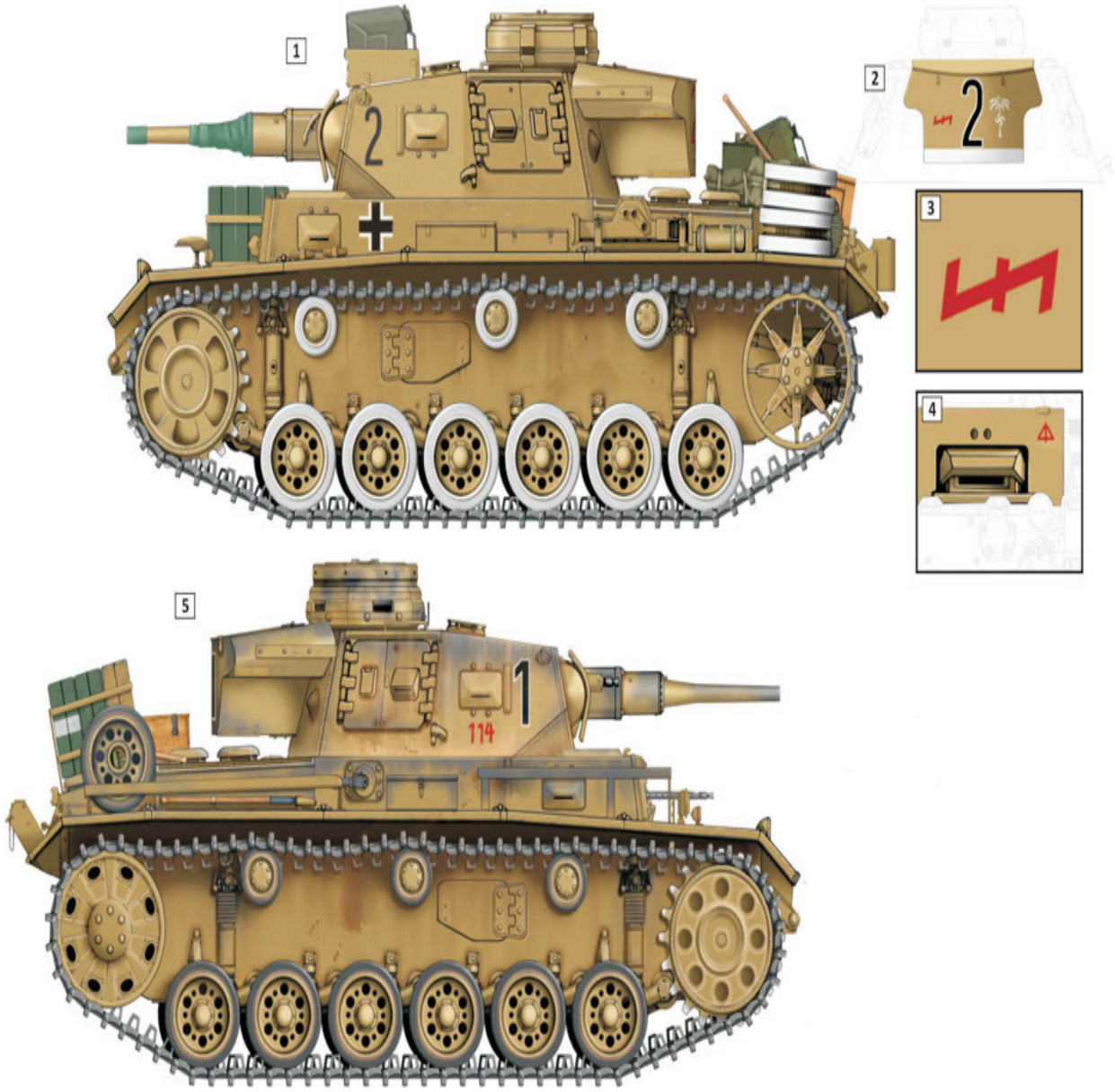
1. Panzerbefehlswagen III ausf H. II.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 5. Libya, autumn 1941. This command tank is the vehicle shown on page 17 and has changed little except for a coat of RAL 8000 Gelbbraun camouflage which has begun to wear in a number of places. Our photograph (3) shows the same tank and visible here is the unit insignia for the newly-created 21.Panzer-Division and the Afrikakorps formation sign, both probably painted in white. Note that the letter G has been retained but rendered in a dark colour as has the Fahrgestellenummer just visible at the centre of the hull front. The use of pennants to identify command tanks and communicate basic messages was forbidden from November 1941 although the practice continued sporadically well into 1942.



1. Pzkpfw III ausf H. Stab, Panzer-Regiment 8. Libya, late 1941. The modifications carried out to this regiment's tanks were minor and the most obvious is the large rack on the right side trackguard which held fuel containers. The companies were usually identified by a single number while the battalion headquarters used the Roman numerals I and II and the tanks of the Regimentsstab were marked with the letter R as shown here. The placement of the 15.Panzer-Division unit insignia on the hull side and front (2) was common but the unusual variation shown

here (3) may have been restricted to the regimental headquarters.

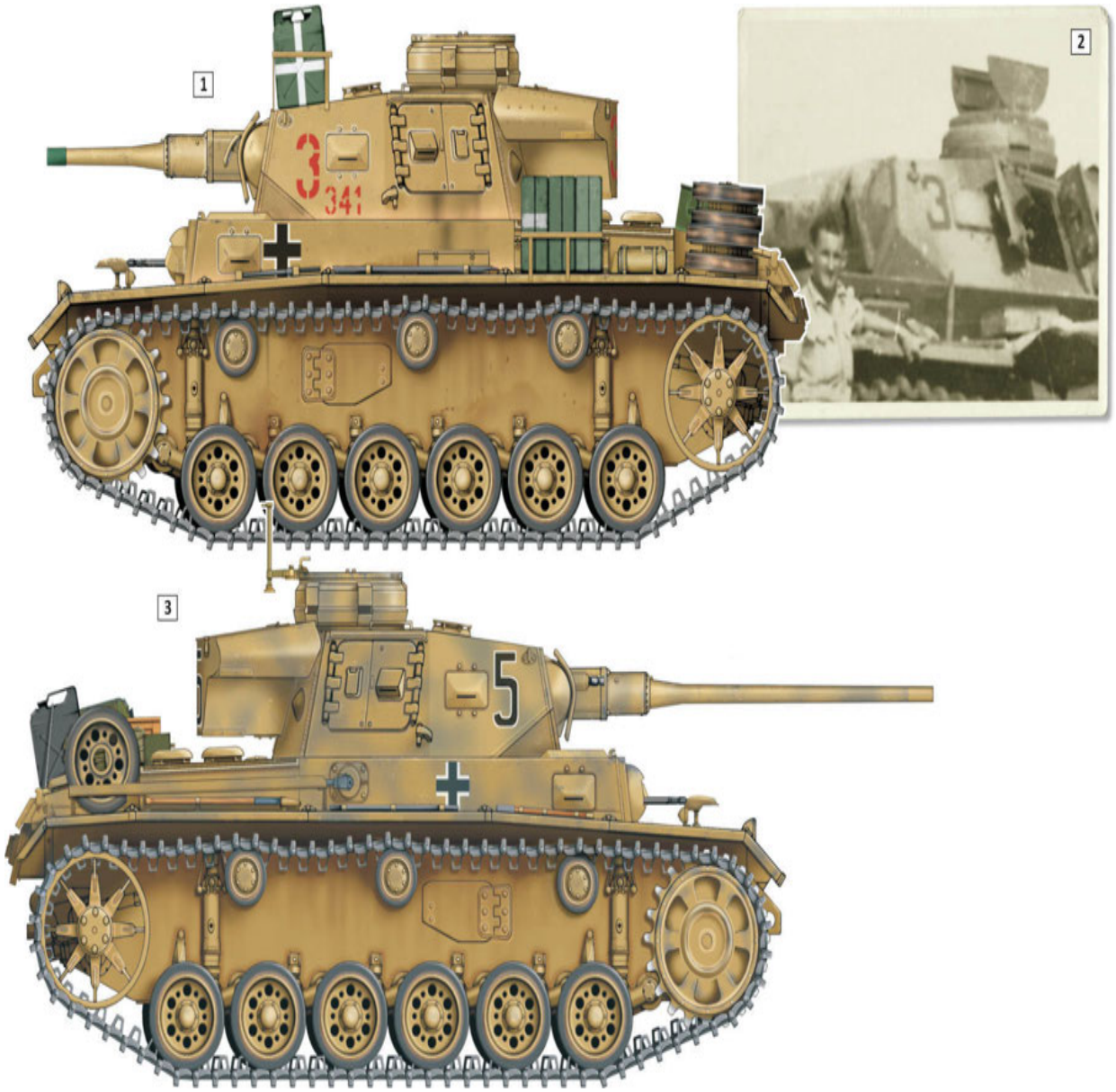
4. Panzerbefehlswagen III ausf H. Stab, Panzer-Regiment 8. Libya, late 1941. Pennants and flags were commonly used by both sides in North Africa and although the examples shown on this tank are somewhat conjectural they are both based on surviving artifacts. Those shown in our other illustrations identify the headquarters of a Panzer regiment (5), the headquarters of a regiment's II.Abteilung (6) and an unofficial example discovered on a Pzkpfw III destroyed in the El Alamein battles (7). All are painted on a metal plate and the first two have hooks to enable their easy replacement.



1. Pzkpfw III ausf H. 2.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 8. Naples, spring 1941. Photographed as it was being loaded onto the Italian transport ship Rialto, this tank is fitted with the 30mm additional armour on the hull front referred to as Zusatzpanzer. Note the elaborate construction of the stowage rack on the turret roof and the fuel containers held on the right side trackguard, a common modification within this regiment. The road wheels and return rollers were painted white for a parade held before the regiment left Italy and many retained traces of this paint for

some time. The turret number sometimes incorporated a white outline (2) and the white band seen here on the rear stowage bin was introduced in November 1941 to identify company commanders. The regiment had its own unit insignia (3) in addition to the sign which identified 15.Panzer-Division (4).

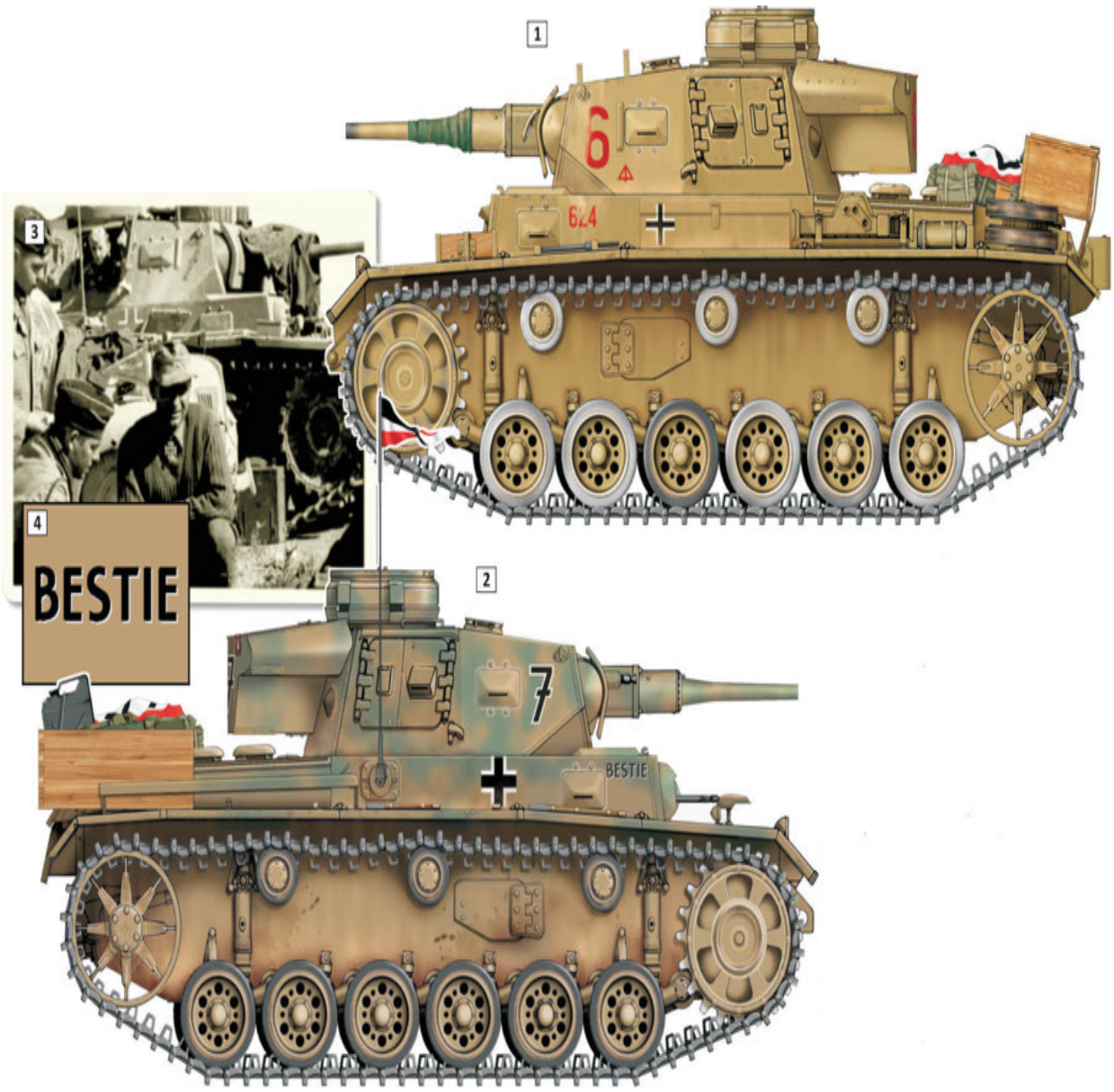
5. Pzkpfw III ausf F. 1.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 8. Libya, early 1942. In addition to the company number, the tank's individual number is also used here, somewhat roughly. The colour red is purely speculative on my part but possible. Note the large rack on the trackguard which was used to carry fuel containers.



1. Pzkpfw III ausf J. 3.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 8. Libya, late 1941 or early 1942. All the tanks of 3.Kompanie and 7.Kompanie were lost when their transports were sunk and replacements were received in late 1941. Most of the Pzkpfw III tanks of 3.Kompanie were marked as shown here but some featured the company number only as can be seen from our photograph (2). The use of the colour red is explained in the Technical Details and Modifications section. The rack on the turret roof was

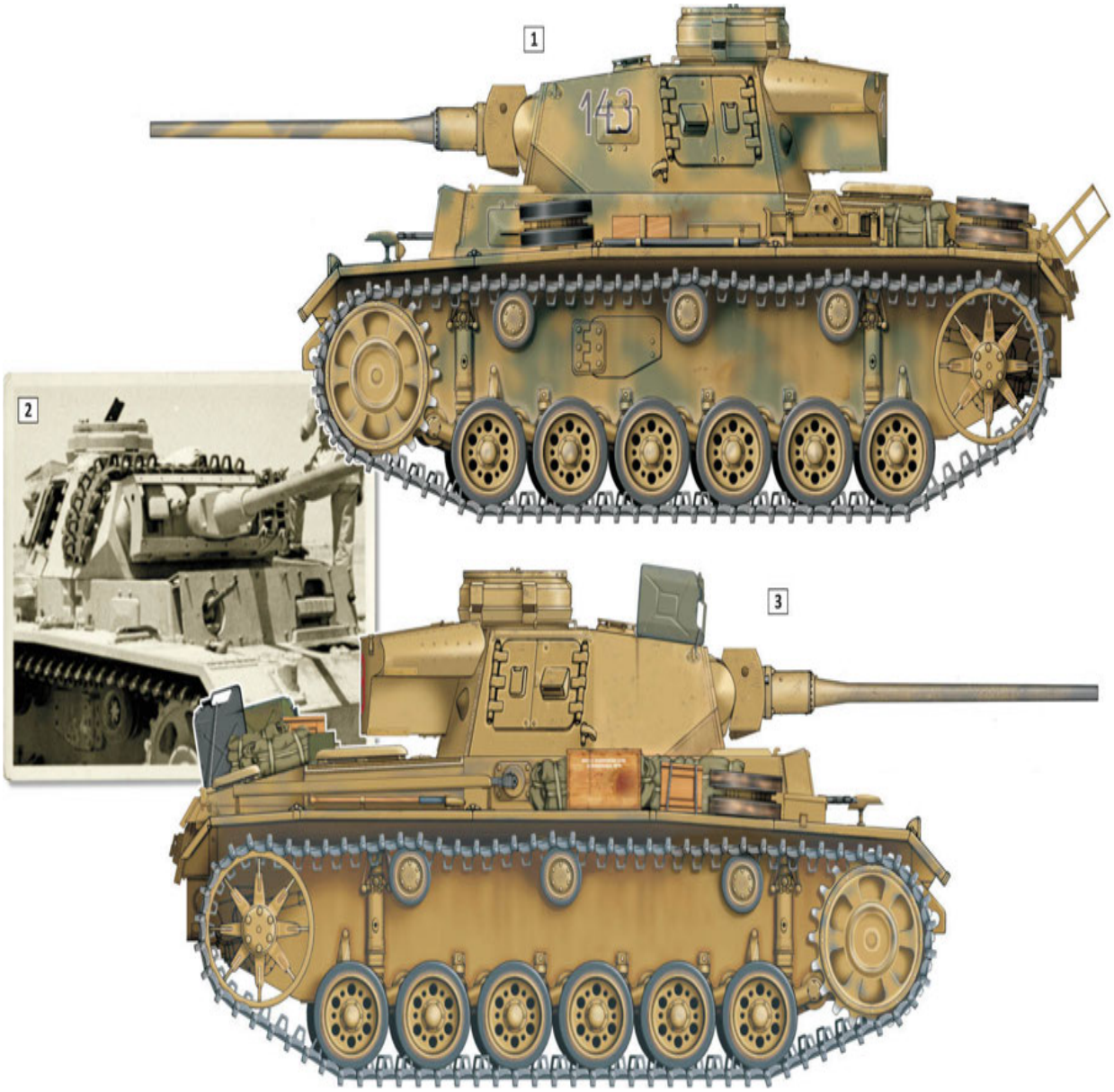
another common modification made to the tanks of this regiment.

3. Pzkpfw III ausf J renamed ausf L. 5.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 8. Libya, early 1942. This vehicle is one of the very first Pzkpfw III ausf J tanks armed with the 5cm L/60 long-barrelled gun and is fitted with the transverse armoured covers on the engine deck air intakes which were replaced in production by covers that were perpendicular to the hull. The latter can be seen in the illustrations on page 26. Note the field modified anti-aircraft machine gun mount fixed to the commander's cupola. The renaming of these tanks is explained in the Technical Details and Modifications section of this book.



1. Pzkpfw III ausf H. 6.Kompani Panzer-Regiment 8. Libya, early 1942. The tanks of this company all seem to have used the numbering system depicted here and although there is some debate about the colours used it is shown here as red, although it could have been a very faded black. Note the division's unit insignia and that the wheels have retained some of their white paint after several months of use.

2. Pzkpfw III ausf J. 7.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 8. Egypt, summer 1942. This tank appears to have been camouflaged in two very dark shades in the photograph on which this illustration is based and given this and the date, it is rendered here in a basecoat of RAL 8020 Braun with a disruptive pattern of RAL 7027 Grau as stipulated by the March 1942 order. As with the other companies of this regiment the turret number could be rendered without an outline (3). Although the use of flags and pennants had been prohibited from November 1941 the example shown here is quite clear in our photograph and is almost identical to a pennant carried by the tank of the regiment's commander in late 1941. The name Bestie, or beast, is shown here as black with a thin white shadow.



1. Pzkpfw III ausf L. I.Kompanle, Panzer-Regiment 5. Egypt, autumn 1942. Said to have been photographed after the battles around El Alamein, this tank is finished in the camouflage scheme of a basecoat in RAL 8020 Braun with a disriputive pattern of RAL 7027 Grau introduced in March 1942, albeit quite faded. Due to production delays complete sets of the Vorpanzer armour were not available for some time and it is common to see tanks in North Africa without the front plate which protected the

gun mantlet (2). Note the much-simplified company number in black with a white outline.

3. Pzkpfw III ausf L. Unit uncertain but possibly Panzer-Regiment 8. Egypt, summer 1942. This tank is one of the vehicles assembled after April 1942 when the Sehklappen, or turret side vision ports, were deleted from production. Note also that it has the simplified hull without escape hatches which was first introduced in June of the same year. This tank also lacks the front section of the Vorpanzer armour for the main gun.

MODEL SHOWCASE

PZKPFW III

AUSF F

1/30 SCALE

MASAHIRO DOI

212

Pz.Kpfw.III Ausf.E
三号戦車E型

Masahiro's model is based on the Nichimo 1/30 scale kit and I am reasonably sure that this is the first time this scale has been featured in the TankCraft series. This kit was originally released in 1972, in both static and motorised versions, and the work that Masahiro put into this project is apparent in these photographs.

Masahiro decided not to use the Nichimo tracks and as there are no 1/30 scale accessories he modified the Modelkasten 1/35 scale VK 3001 individual links to represent the Panzer III/IV 36cm versions. The many tools, fuel containers and spare road wheels were all scratch-built and copies cast in resin. The brackets are photo-etched brass details from Aber which are close to 1/30 scale.

213

213

213

213

Once assembly was complete the model was sprayed with Masahiro's own Panzer Grey mixture which is made up from acrylic gouache Panzer Gray. The markings were applied by hand and then the whole model was sprayed with Mr. Silicone Barrier. Once a coat of a desert sand colour, again Masahiro's own mix, was applied it was judiciously scraped away using a toothpick.

The finished model on its base. As there are no 1/30 scale figures Masahiro sculpted the crew, Hakenkreuz flag and tropical tunic from epoxy putty and painted them using the products employed on the tank.

PZKPFW III

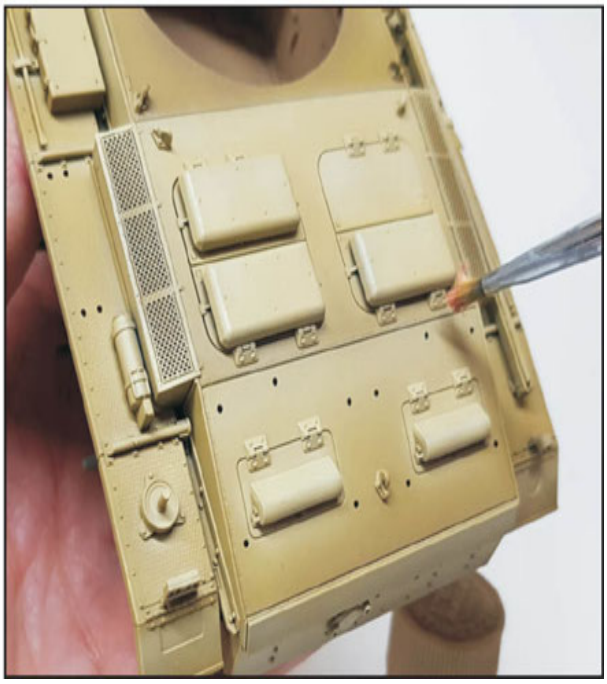
AUSF J

1/48 SCALE

TAEJOON YANG

712
1939

39



Korean modeller Taejoon Yang's Pzkpfw III ausfJ replica is based on the Academy 1/35 scale kit which was released to mark the company's 50th anniversary.

A rear view of the completed model with markings applied. It was built following the kit instructions and painted using Mr. Color paints, a popular medium in Japan and Korea. A primer coats of Wood Brown was applied first and then covered with a mix of Dark Yellow and White in increasingly lighter shades as shown on the previous page.

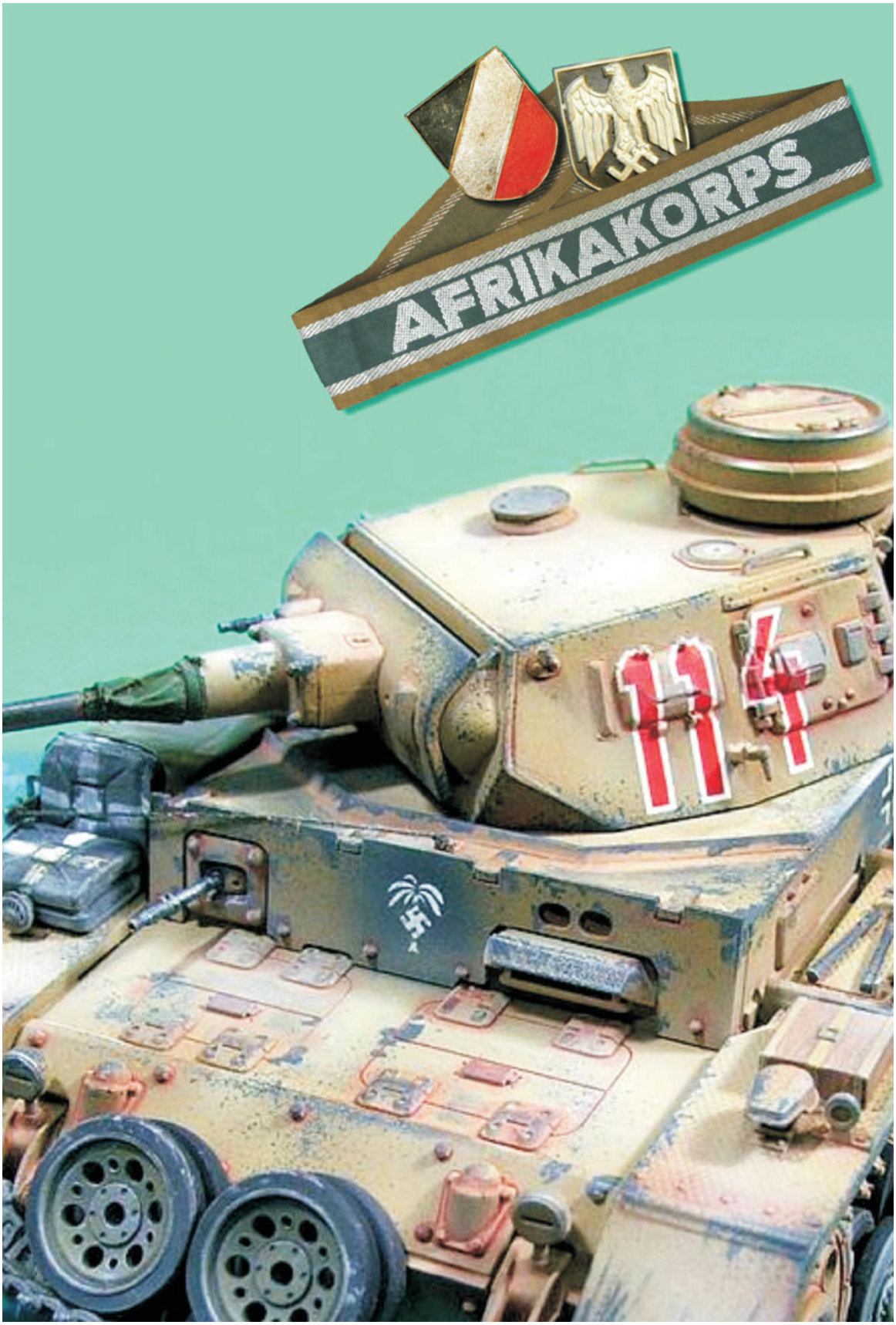
Another view of Taejoon's finished project The weathering was achieved by the application of a number of washes and accentuating the highlights with Tamiya Acrylic colours mixed with artist's oils. Several coats of clear varnish were used to make sure the transfers conformed to the contours of the turret.

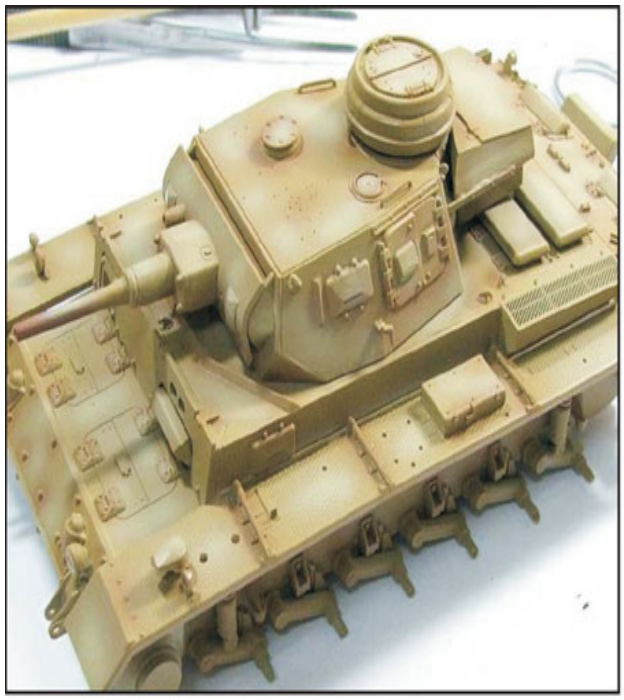
PZKPFW III

AUSF G

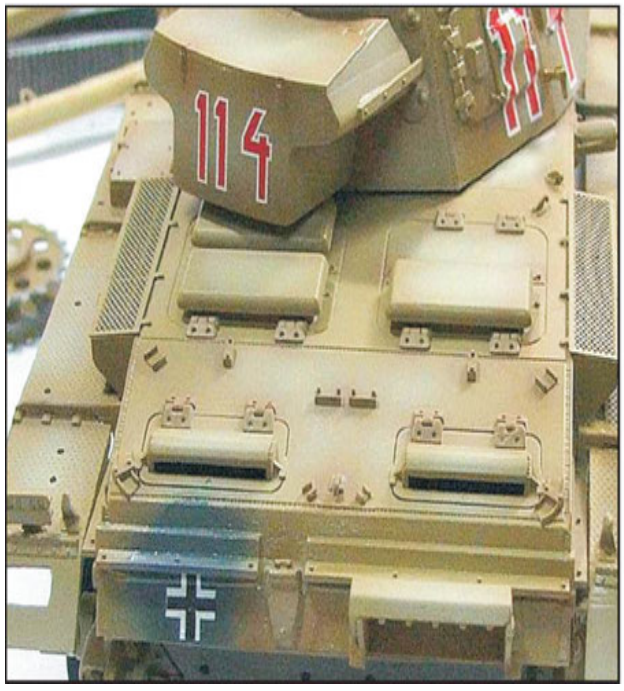
1/48 SCALE

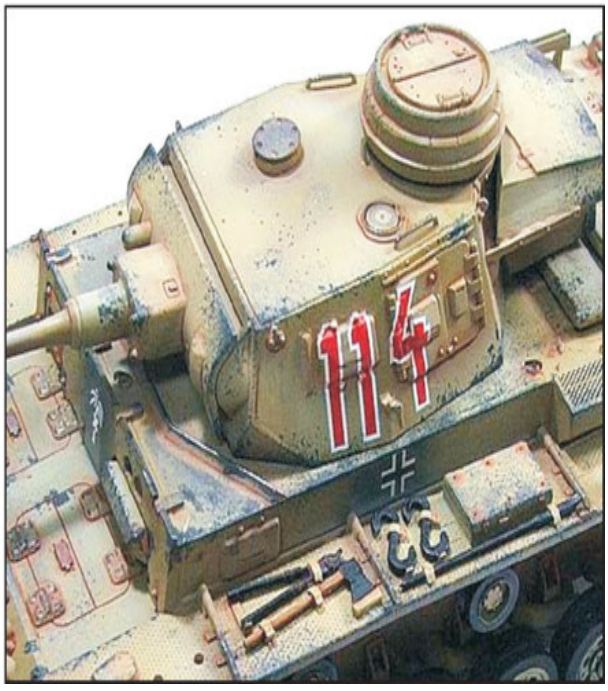
MARCOS SERRA

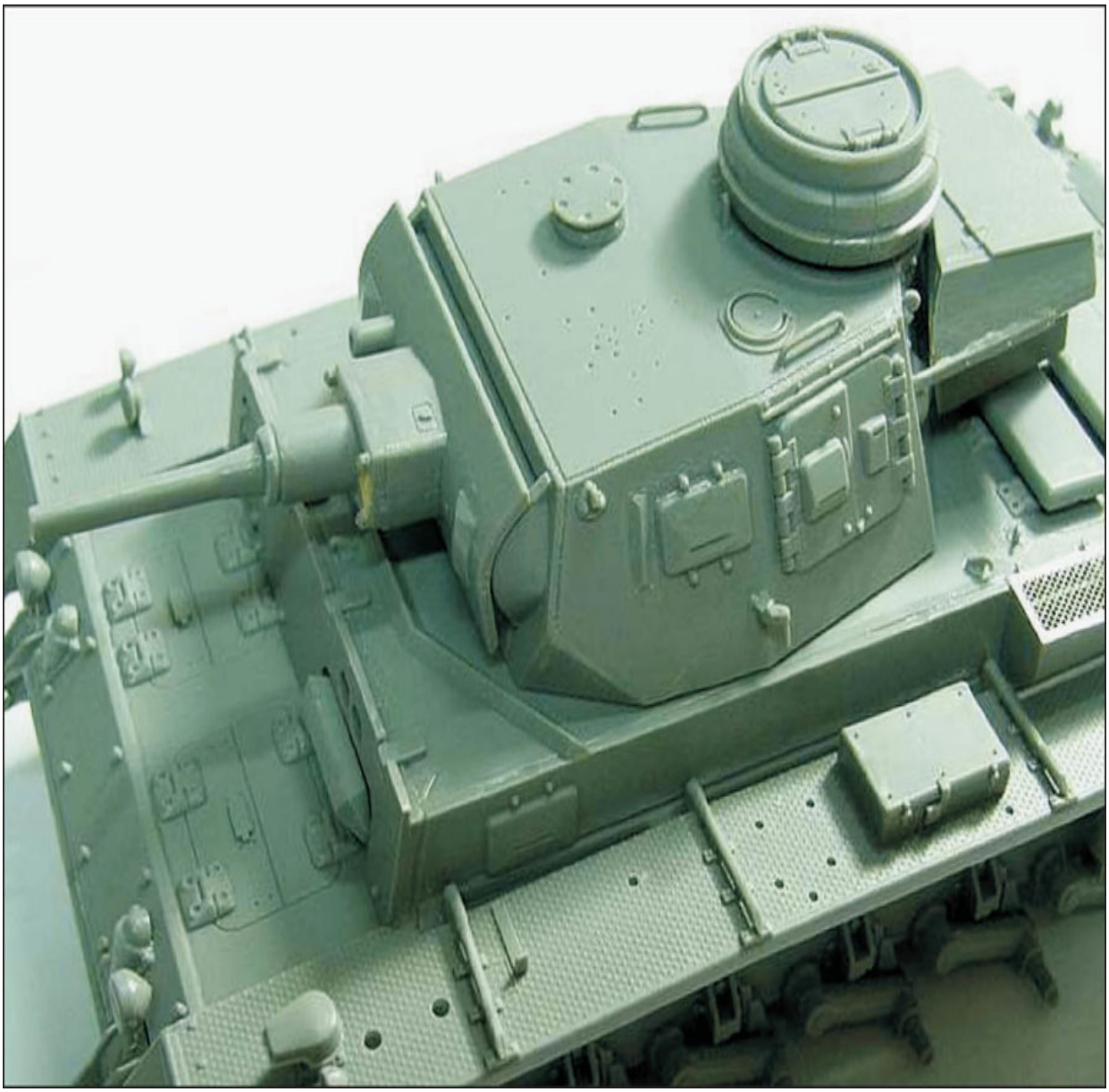

AFRIKAKORPS



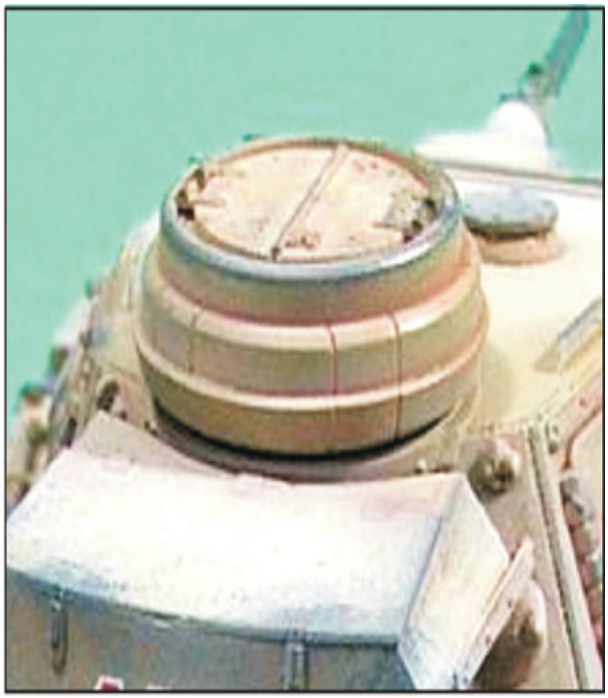
114

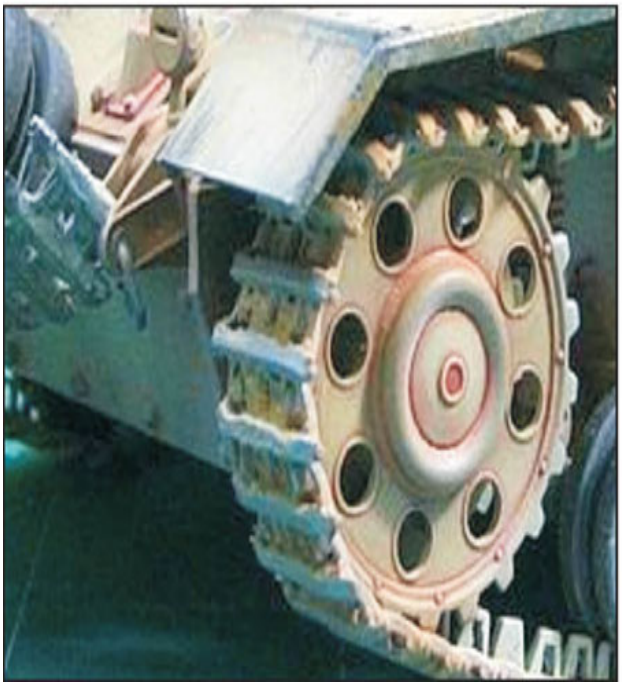

114

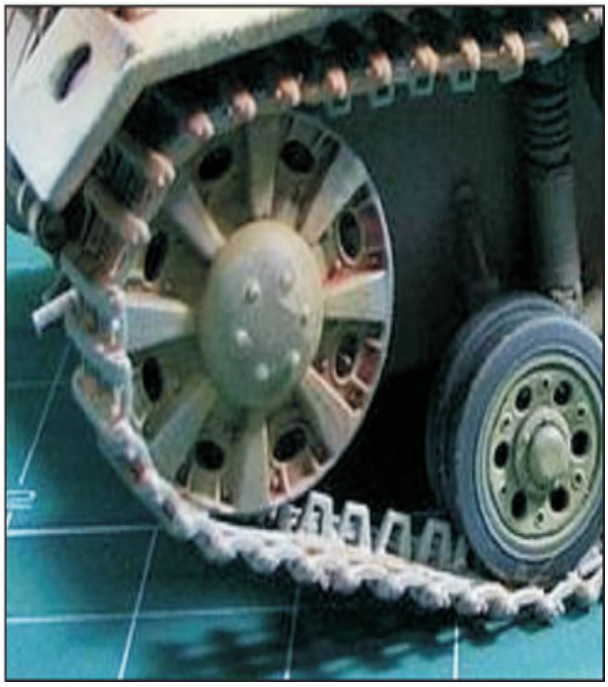

114



Marcos' replica was built using Dragon's 1/35 scale kit originally released in 1966 which is, in fact, based largely on the earlier Gunze Sangyo model. He repositioned the front return rollers and incorporated some parts from the Dragon Models STUG III kit, notably in the suspension and lower hull. Once construction was complete, the model was painted in various shades of Tamiya Desert Yellow and Dark Grey.







Details of Marcos' completed model showing the extensive paint chipping, which was achieved with a fine brush, and realistic weathering.

Another view of the completed model. The markings were provided with the kit and represent a tank of I.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5. Marcos used Micr Sol solution to flatten them and ensure a realistic appearance. Although the colour used to render the centre of the turret number is a matter of some debate, the red used here is undeniably striking. A photograph of the actual vehicle can be seen on page 64.

The canvas cover for the main gun and tarpaulin that protects the fuel containers were both common sights in the desert and Marcos used tracing paper soaked with a water-based glue to build them.

PZKPFW III

AUSF J

1/48 SCALE

SUNGJUN JANG

341
25

German Panzer III Ausf. J
최초공개
221
ACADEMY
HOBBY MODEL KITS

Sungjun's work has been featured in a number of books in this series and his model was built using the Academy 1/35 scale Pzkpfw III ausf J.

Details of the finished model including the Rommeikiste, or rear stowage box, spare track links, turret and suspension.

The finished model complete with markings. Apart from a few photo-etched details from Voyager Model and aftermarket tracks from Friulmodel, the kit was assembled straight from the box. Sunjung used acrylic paints from Ammo by Mig Jimenez, which produce a specific RAL 8020 Gelbbraun colour mix, and also the company's weathering products.

A rear view of Sungjun Jang's Pzkpfw III ausf J. The rack on the hull rear was common to most, if not all, the tanks of 3.Kompanie of Panzer-Regiment 8. The colours used to depict the turret numbers are a matter of some debate and are discussed in the Technical Details and Modifications section of this book.

MODELLING PRODUCTS

The first plastic kits of the Pzkpfw III tank were probably those released by Tamiya in 1/21 scale in the early 1960s and even by the standards of the day these were very inaccurate representations. But with the decision to concentrate on a constant scale of 1/35 in 1970, Tamiya produced a totally new kit marketed as Panzerkampfwagen III Ausf. M/N and this was a major step forward in both detail and accuracy.

At about the same time, companies such as Otaki, Hasegawa and Fujimi in Japan, ESCI in Italy and Matchbox in Britain began releasing kits of the Pzkpfw III inl/35, 1/72 and 1/76 scale and these were all quite good models, most representing the later versions armed with the long-barrelled 5cm gun. Many of these old kits have been re-boxed and released under the logos of several companies in the intervening years.

From 1987 Gunze Sangyo released a series of highly detailed replicas and these models, although somewhat expensive, introduced a large audience to the concept of a multi-media kit, containing plastic sprues with photo-etched brass and white metal details and optional barrels in turned aluminium. The company's first offering was a 1/35 scale Pzkpfw III auf J and this model formed the basis for the extensive range of kits later released by Dragon Models. The last few decades have seen something of a boom in the plastic model industry and kits of the Pzkpfw III are currently available in sizes ranging from 1/285 scale wargames tanks to massive 1/6 scale radio-controlled vehicles.

As with the other books in this series, I have chosen to concentrate on the most popular modelling scales of 1/35 and 1/48 and further examples can be seen in TankCraft27: Panzer III: German Army Light Tank Operation Barbarossa, 1941.

As many manufacturers regularly withdraw products from their catalogues, often only to repackage and re-release them at some later date, I have tried to include models which are readily available at the time of writing and where this is not so I have tried to make it clear. Similarly, as this title deals with the tanks that took part in the North African battles of 1941 and 1942 I have endeavoured, for the most part, to include versions of the Pzkpfw III which would have been the most commonly encountered during that time. An index of manufacturers, with their contact details, can be found on page 64.

TAMIYA INC

This Japanese company, the largest model manufacturer in the world, has produced a large range of armoured vehicles, with complementary figures and accessories, and was almost solely responsible for the rise in popularity of 1/35 scale. Although rather basic by today's standards, the kits released from the early 1970s were highly accurate and detailed when compared to what else was available at the time. Importantly, they were easy to build and affordable and, like Airfix before them, Tamiya kits were all made to a common scale which encouraged modellers to build a collection. The company's near monopoly of the 1/35 scale market remained unchallenged until the release of the first Dragon Models kits in 1987. In 2003 Tamiya began releasing models in 1/48 scale and this has

been extremely successful for the company, combining the potential for a high level of detail without the expense of the bigger kits. The current catalogue lists a Pzkpfw III ausf L and ausf N in both 1/35 and 1/48 scale and I should mention that they cannot be built as the earlier versions without extra parts.

Tamiya's 1/35 scale Pzkpfw III ausfL complete with crew and Generalfeldmarschall Rommel figure. The markings are those of Panzer-Regiment 7, a unit which arrived in North Africa in late 1942 and will be covered in the second volume of this set dealing with the Pzkpfw III.

DRAGON MODELS LTD

Dragon Models was one of the first of the major manufacturers to offer accurate replicas in 1/35 scale and their kits are today something of a benchmark. The company's small scale releases are some of the best available. At the time of writing this Hong Kong-based company offered in 1/35 scale a Pzkpfw III ausf E/F, an ausf G, as a Tauchpanzer and with the Tropen air intakes, an ausf H in early and late production versions and also as a Befehlspanzerwagen, and an ausf J in both 1/35 and 1/72 scale which can be built as a number of variants. All these kits have been re-boxed at some time, usually with different markings, and some include photo-etched brass parts.

Above: A selection of Dragon Models' Pzkpfw III kits in 1/35 and 1/72 scale. Although they are marketed as being specific to a certain period and unit these models can all be built as tanks that took part in the North African campaign. At right: Dragon Models' Pzkpfw III ausf H completed with the phot-etched detail set from E.T. Model.

A selection of Dragon Models' Pzkpfw III kits in 1/35 and 1/72 scale. Although they are marketed as being specific to a certain period and unit these models can all be built as tanks that took part in the North African campaign. At right: Dragon Models" Pzkpfw III ausfH completed with the phot-etched detail set from E.T. Model.

Two detail shots of the Dragon Models Pzkpfw III ausfJ model and the Befehlspanzerwagen kit, based on the Pzkpfw III ausfH with the earlier gun mantlet, both in 1/35 scale.

ZVEZDA

Founded in 1990, this Russian company's catalogue is heavily weighted towards modern Russian and Soviet-era vehicle and aircraft models but does include a Pzkpfw III ausf F in 1/35 scale and a Pzkpfw III ausf G in 1/100 scale. The latter size is roughly compatible with 15mm wargames figures and the kit is quite a basic representation, lacking many identifying details.

Zvezda's 1/35 scale Pzkpfw III ausf F completed with the photo-etched brass detail set from Eduard Model Accessories. Based largely on the old Dragon Models Pzkpfw III ausf E and ausf J kits, a small number of these early production models were with Panzer-Regiment 5.

ACADEMY PLASTIC MODELS

Based in Korea, this company offers a large range of military vehicle kits and scale figures. The company's Pzkpfw III ausf J is a completely new kit released in the last few months and includes photo etched brass details, optional parts for both armament and exhaust systems and link-and-length tracks. In addition there are nine marking options, all for tanks which served in North Africa.

Academy's 1/35 scale Pzkpfw III ausf J built and painted following the kit instructions. The markings are those of Panzer-Regiment 5 and

are supplied with the kit.

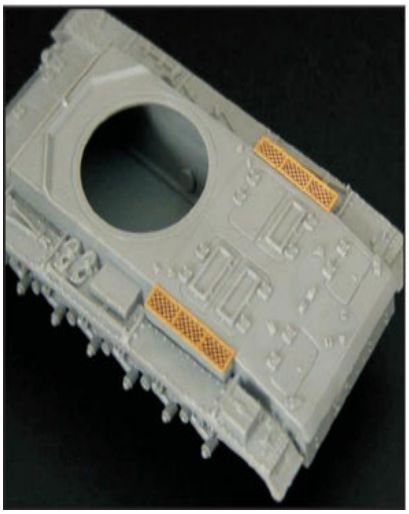
ITALERI

Founded in 1962, this Italian company's current catalogue contains a 1/72 scale model kit of the Pzkpfw III ausf M, a small number of which were shipped to North Africa and took part in the fighting in Tunisia, with optional parts for the Pzkpfw III ausf N. This kit was originally released by ESCI in 1977 but it was quite a detailed and accurate kit for the time. Italeri's Fast-Assembly range offers a Pzkpfw III which can be built as an ausf J or ausf L. Of the large model manufacturers Italeri alone has ventured into 1/56 scale with a Pzkpfw III model which can be built as multiple versions. This scale complements 28mm wargames figures of which there are now quite a number on the market.

Italeri's 1/56 scale Pzkpfw III. At right: Detail views of the same model built straight from the box.

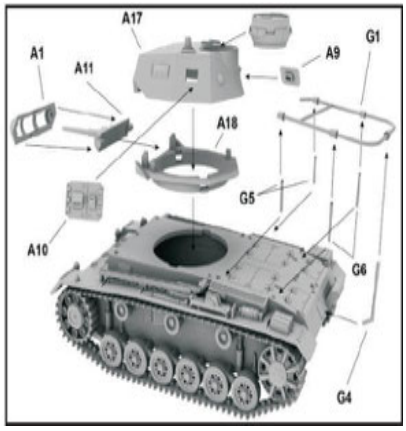
ATTACK HOBBY KITS

This Czech company has been producing scale model tanks since 1992, mostly in the smaller scales. Some of the earlier kits, such as the Panzerbefehlswagen III, lack detail but the most recent offerings are of a higher quality and very easy to build. Shown below are details of the Pzkpfw III ausf J in 1/72 scale. The Ostketten tracks are optional and are of course not appropriate for the period covered by this book. The basic hull shown at left is finished with photo-etched detail from Hauler.



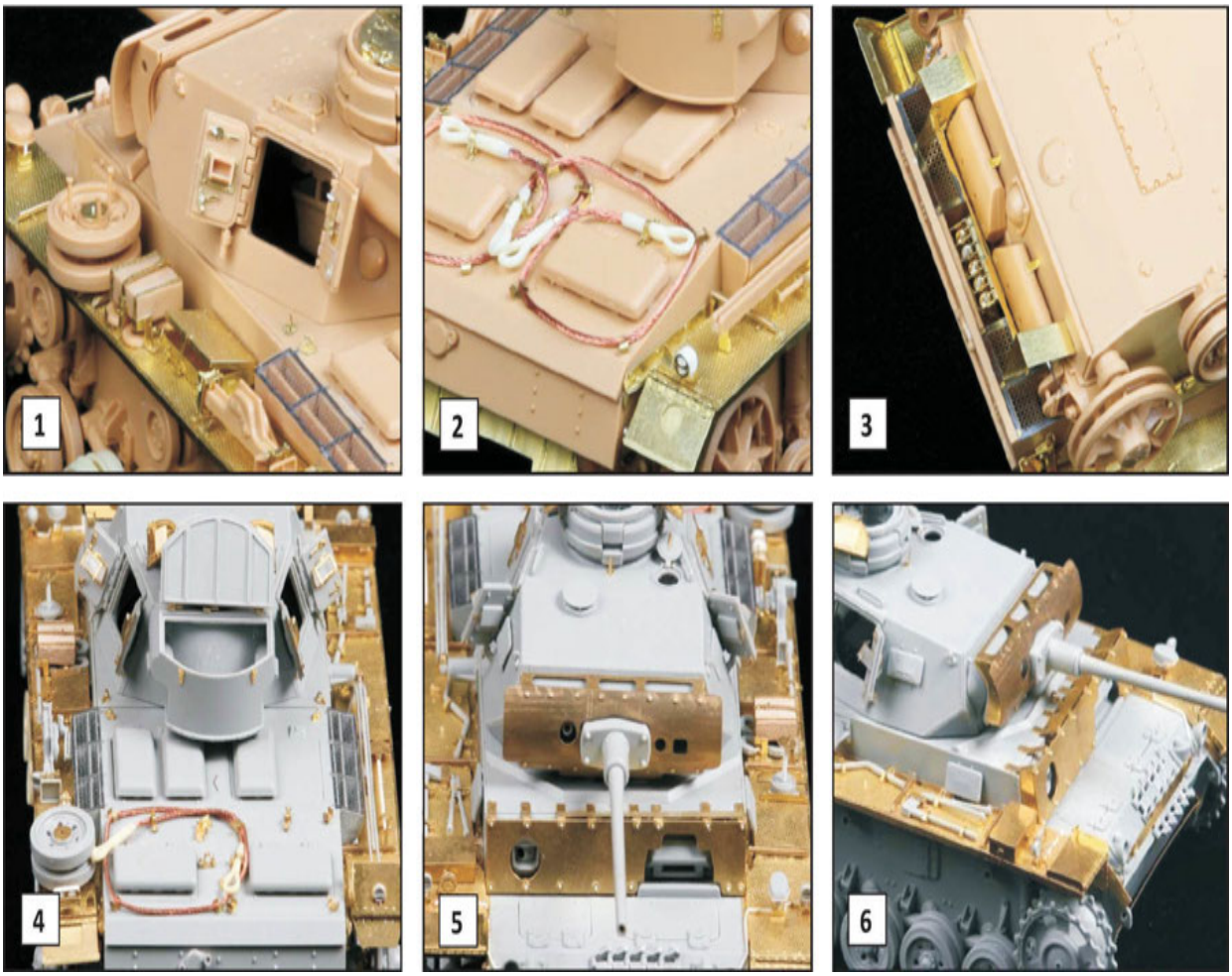
FIRST TO FIGHT

This is a recently-formed company that specialises in producing 1/72 scale versions of the vehicles used by the main protagonists of the 1939 Polish campaign. In addition to tanks there are a number of armoured car and figure sets. Shown below is the company's Pzkpfw III ausf E which is also the basis for the Panzerbefehlswagen version which served in North Africa. These models are reasonably detailed but essentially aimed at the wargamer, evidenced by the simplified construction shown at right.



VOYAGER MODEL

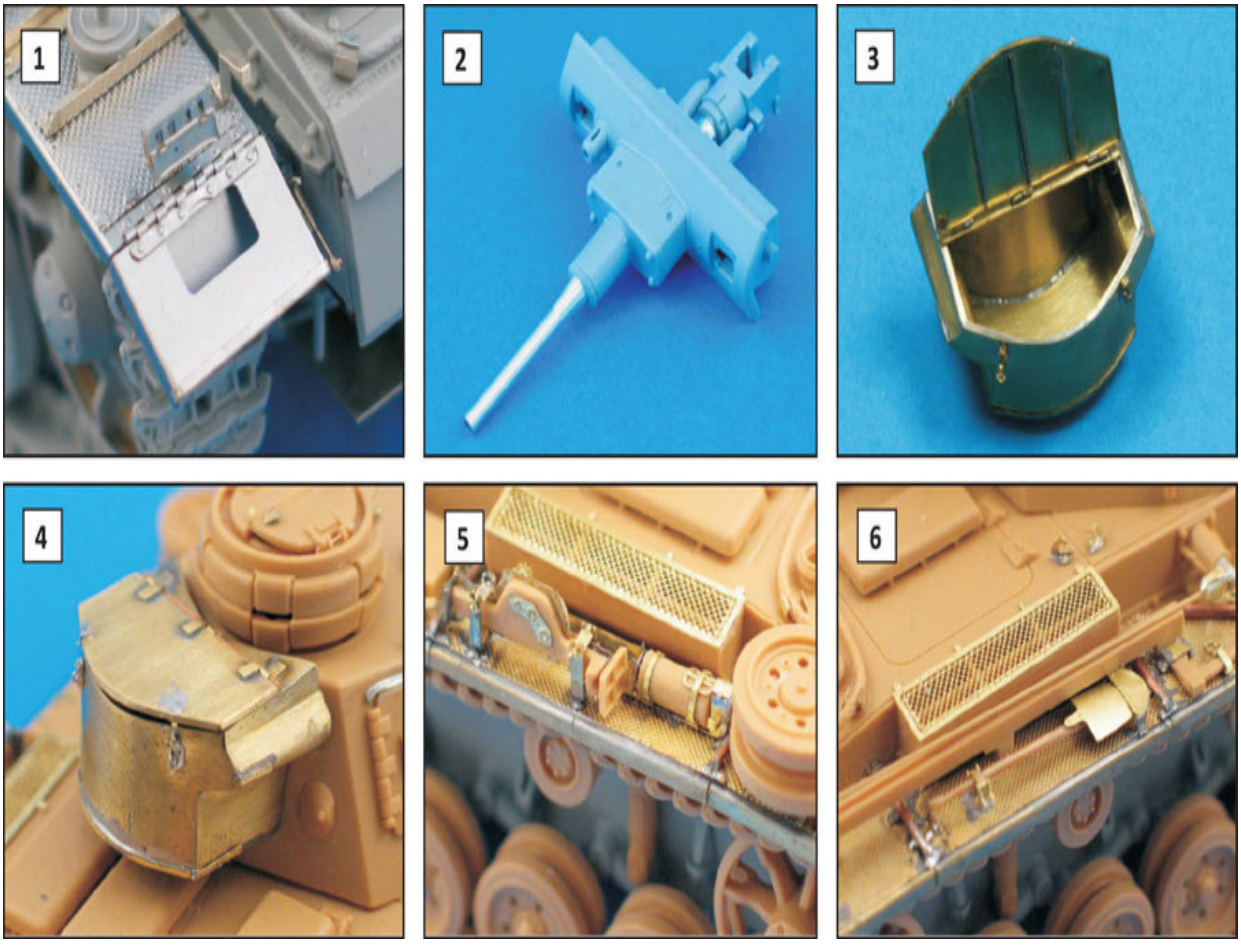
Voyager Model, based in Shanghai, have been manufacturing upgrade sets for scale models since 2003 with the release of their first set for 1/35 scale armour. The company produces a number of items in both 1/72 and 1/35 scale in photo-etched brass and also resin, including wheel hubs, damaged road wheels, ammunition crates and fuel containers. Voyager also offers highly detailed and accurate gun barrels in milled aluminium and brass. Shown below are details from Voyager's upgrade sets for, 1 to 3. Tamiya's Pzkpfw III ausf L. 4 to 6. Dragon Models' Pzkpfw III ausf J, both in 1/35 scale.



ABER

This Polish company has been manufacturing and selling upgrade sets since 1995, working in photoetched brass, milled aluminium, stainless steel and even wood. For some time now Tamiya has included a number of Aber products with their models. A full list of the accessories made specifically for the Pzkpfw III in all scales would be far too long to list on this page, particularly in light of the company's regular new releases, and the reader can find the company's contact details on page 64. Shown below are. 1. Detail of the upgrade set for the 1/35 scale Dragon kit. 2. A turned aluminium barrel of the 3.7cm

gun in 1/35 scale. 3. A 1/35 scale Pzkpfw III stowage bin in photo-etched brass. 4, 5 and 6. Details of Aber's upgrade set for the Tamiya 1/48 scale model.



RYE FIELD MODEL

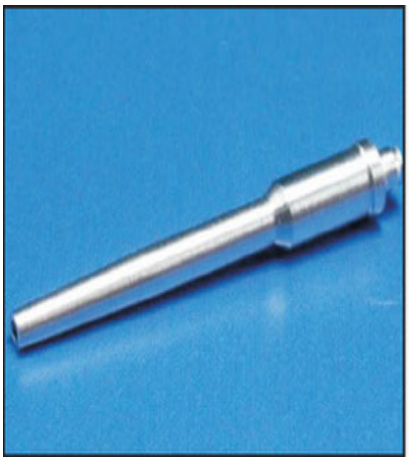
A relatively new model company based in Hong Kong, Rye Field Model made an impressive entry to the market with the release of three highly detailed kits depicting Tiger I variants in the short space of time between September 2015 and February 2016. The Pzkpfw III ausf J kit shown here is promised to be the first in a series and

features a fully detailed interior. A less expensive kit omits the interior but both have workable tracks and torsion bar suspension.

Rye Field Model's 1.35 scale Pzkpfw III ausf J. Below: Details of the same kit including the photo-etched brass air intake screens and tool box, cupola interior with periscopes and Vorpanzer add-on armour.

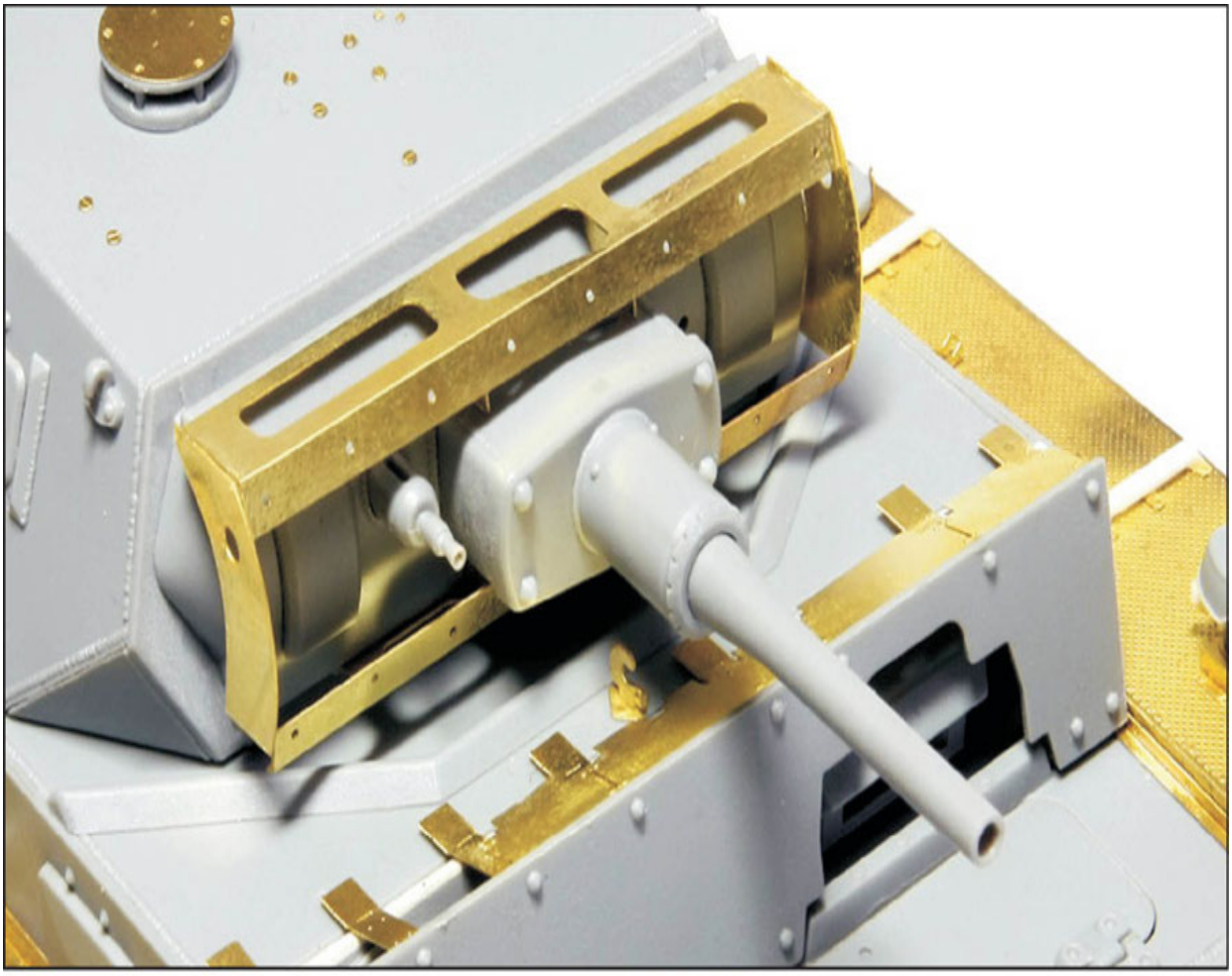
RB MODEL

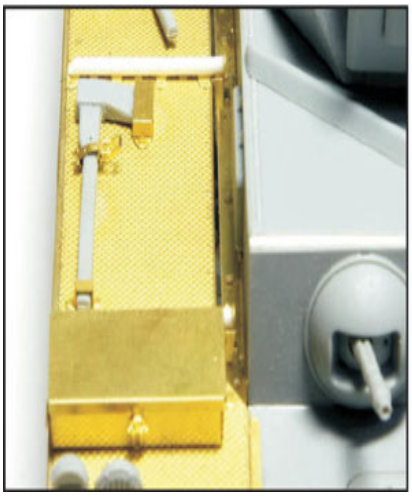
RB Model from Poland produce a range of milled aluminium and brass gun barrels and resin accessories for 1/72, 1/48 and 1/35 scale armour models. Shown below, from left to right, are the beautifully detailed 3.7cm and 5cm gun barrels in 1/35 scale and a tiny barrel for an MG 34 in 1/48 scale. RB Model also offers a large selection of generic accessories such as radio antenna insulators, towing shackles, ammunition crates and fuel containers.

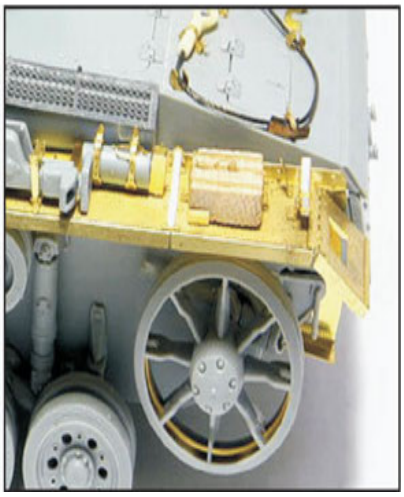


E.T. MODEL

This company, based in China, produces upgrade sets in 1/72 and 1/35 scale in brass and resin, Although most sets are specifically designed, according to the company, to fit Dragon or Tamiya kits, some parts or accessories, for example the stowage bins, are referred to as universal. Shown below are the Vorpanzer additional armour fitted to the gun mantlet and below that details of the photo-etched brass fender set for the Pzkpfw III ausf H to ausfN, all in 1/35 scale.

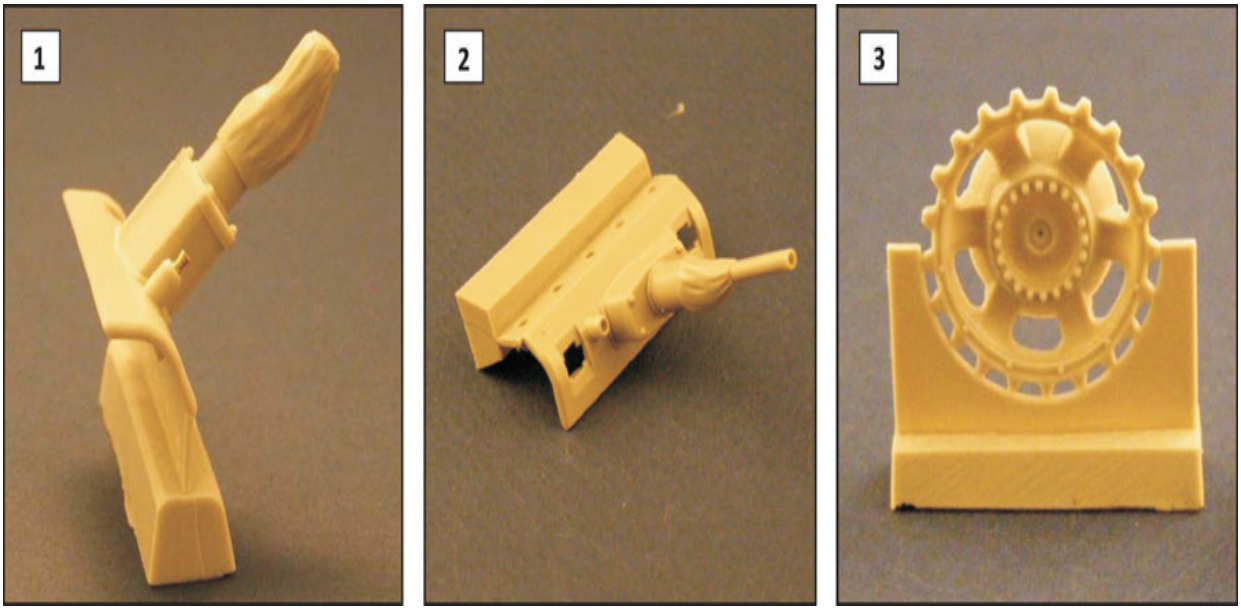






PANZER ART

Based in Poland, this company produces a large range of resin parts for Second World War and modern era armoured vehicles in 1/35 scale. Shown here, are: 1. Canvas cover, mantlet and brass MG 34 barrel for the 3.7cm gun. 2. Canvas cover and gun mantlet for the 5cm gun. 3. Later-style drive sprocket which was introduced towards the end of the Pzkpfw III ausf G production run.

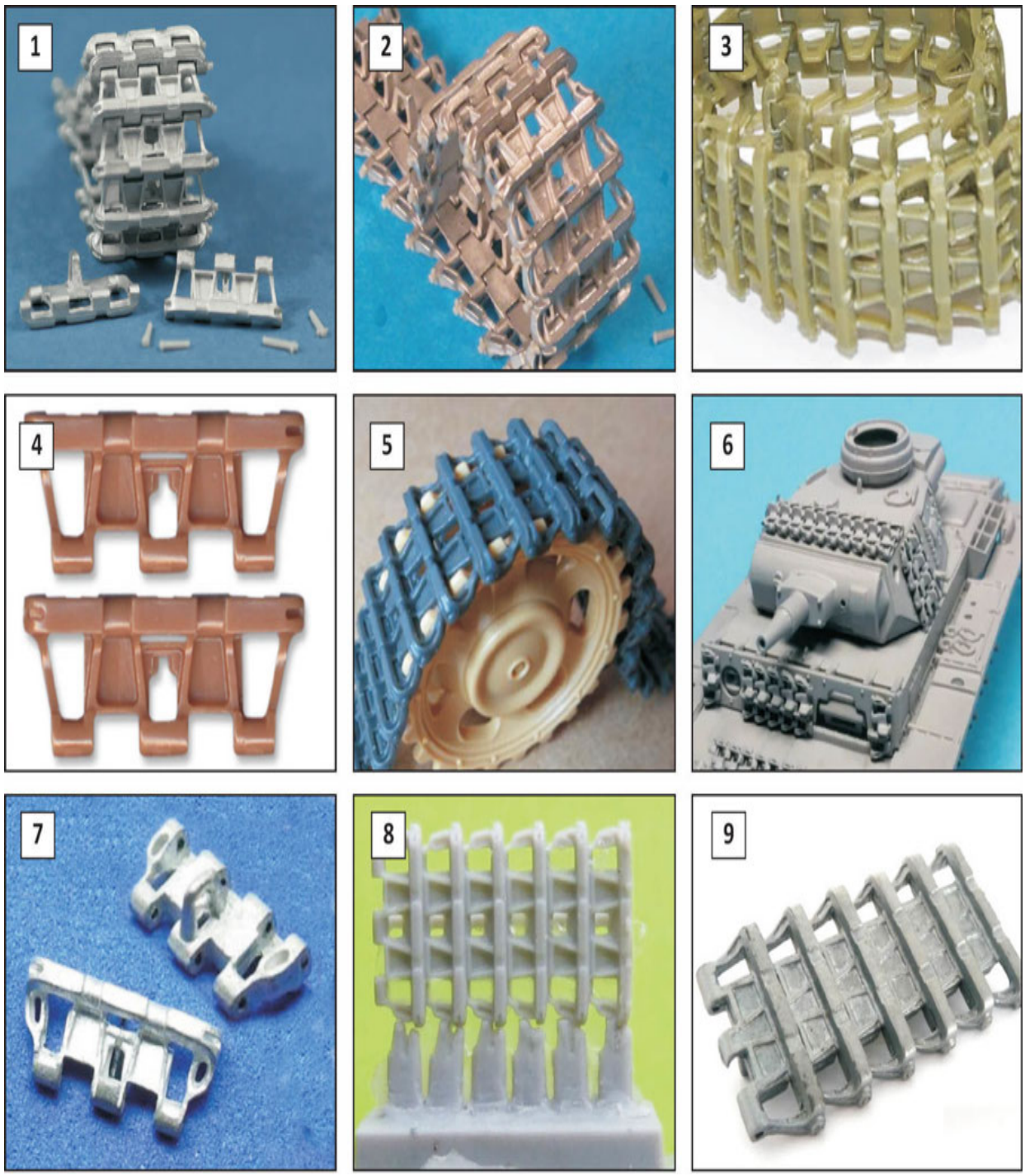


BLACK DOG

Based in the Czech Republic, this company produces a large range o f detailed resin accessory and upgrade sets for armoured vehicles in 1/35, 1/48 and 1/72 scale and a small number complete kits. Although the accessories shown here are marketed as appropriate to later models of the Pzkpfw III, most would be suitable for the North African campaign.

AFTERMARKET TRACKS

Most plastic kits today contain realistic tracks made from either a form of vinyl which, unlike the older types, can be glued together or hard plastic individual links. Nevertheless, there are many modellers who wish for the highest level of detail and realism possible and consequently the number of quality aftermarket products available seems to have increased in recent years, despite the extra expense and work required. In order to operate properly, motorised models require workable tracks made up from individual links held together by pins, as were the full-size items.



A selection of aftermarket tracks. 1. Masterclub 1/35 scale early Pzkpfw III tracks. 2. Pzkpfw III tracks introduced in 1941 also from Masterclub in 1/35 scale. 3. Fully workable plastic tracks from Miniart. These tracks, and the company's Pzkpfw III kits, come with a jig to

help with assembly. 4. Individual Modelkasten Pzkpfw III tracks in 1/35 scale. 5. Kaizen early pattern tracks in 1/35 scale. 6.1/72 scale spare tracks from JK Resin. These are not workable links. 7.1/35 scalefrom Spade Ace Models. 8.1/72 scalefrom OB Grigorov. 9.1/16 scalefrom OzArmour specifically designed for the Hen Long model. This is in fact a length of spare track but the company does offer fully assembled workable tracks.

TECHNICAL DETAILS AND MODIFICATIONS

The first models of the Pzkpfw III, from the ausf A through to the ausf D, were essentially development vehicles and although a handful served in the Polish and French campaigns none were shipped to North Africa. However, many of the features of these early designs became standard in the mass production models, most notably the turret and main armament, and they are examined in TankCraft 27: Panzer III German Army Light Tank, Operation Barbarossa, 1941. In fact the most radical change incorporated into production with the Pzkpfw III ausf E was the adoption of a torsion bar suspension which replaced the initial large road wheels and later leaf spring suspension. Every tank was identified by a Fahrgestellnummer, or chassis number, usually abbreviated to Fgst Nr., and these can sometimes be seen in contemporary photographs. As they are a certain means of identifying a model or version I have included them here as they related to a particular production batch. For reasons of space I have not included some minor modifications such as the placement or rearrangement of lifting hooks, tool clasps and hinges and the following is intended to be a spotter's guide to enable the modeller and interested reader to differentiate between the models of the Pzkpfw III that were in service with the Afrikakorps during 1941 and 1942. Most tanks that were despatched to North Africa were subjected to a number of field modifications before leaving Germany or after arriving in North Africa and these are shown in the Camouflage & Markings section of this book.

The Umbewaffnung programme. Before examining the individual production versions of the Pzkpfw III it may be helpful to

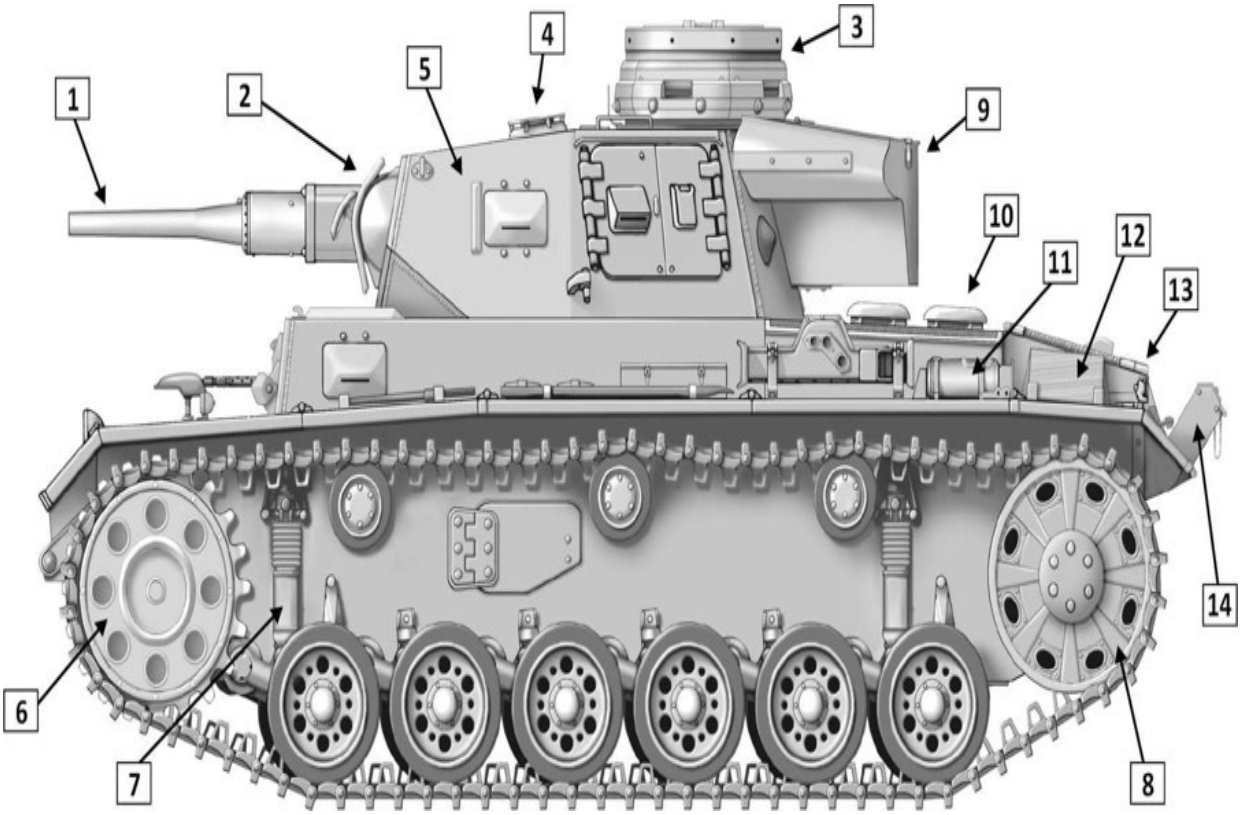
mention the major refurbishment project referred to at the time as Umbewaffnung, or rearmament. By 25 September 1940, the Heereswaffenamt (1) had determined that approximately 1,200 Pzkpfw III tanks already in service would need to be upgraded to something approaching the standard of the Pzkpfw III ausf H, that was just about to come into service, and the Pzkpfw III ausf J which was still in the development stage.

It was anticipated that the earlier production models would need to be rearmed with the 5cm main gun and external mantlet and fitted with additional armour, referred to as Zusatzpanzerung. Other modifications included the widening of the suspension to accept the Kgs.61/400/120 tracks, and the replacement of the shock absorbers and torsion bars with newer versions. About half the tanks in question would need all the modifications listed while the remainder would only require an upgrade to their suspension. It was anticipated that the conversions would be completed by March 1941. In addition to the modifications mentioned here many tanks were fitted with Gepäckkasten, or stowage boxes, and the armoured covers of the socalled Tropen air intakes (2).

In early October 1940 the firms of Deutsche Eisenwerke, Daimler-Benz, Steyr-Daimler-Puch, Klöckner-Humbolt-Deutz and the Heereszeugamt Wein were contracted to convert the first 205 vehicles but the programme suffered from major delays and by May 1941 had come to a complete halt. In June it was decided that the conversions would be put on hold until the successful conclusion of the campaign in the East.

Although more than 330 Pzkpfw III tanks were rebuilt through the Umbewaffnung programme, many early model tanks were not upgraded with all the desired modifications and as late as January

1942 it was noted that recent arrivals in North Africa had not been fitted with all the required Tropen, or tropical service features.

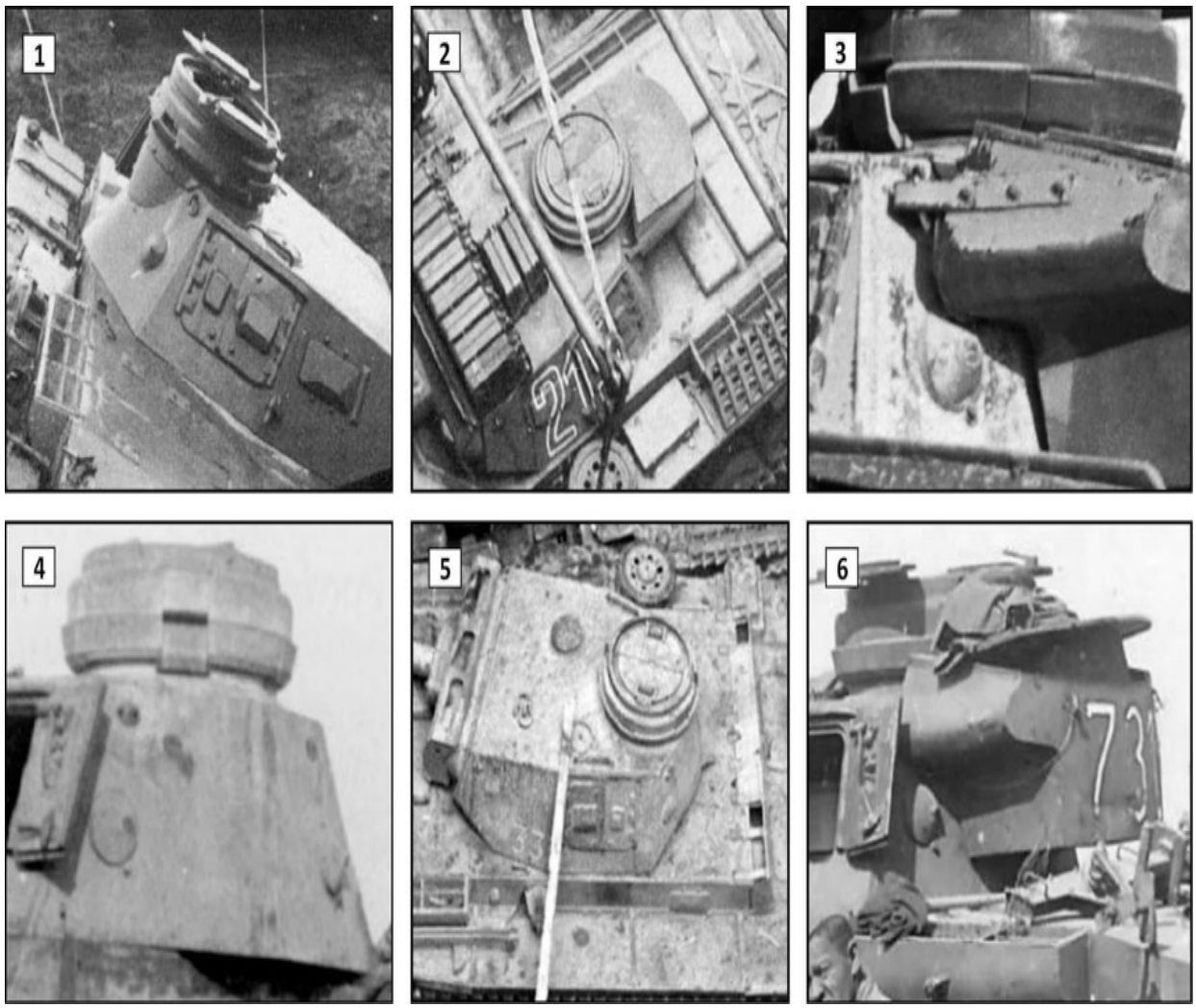


A Pzkpfw III ausf G typical of the tanks that arrived in Libya in March 1941. This vehicle is armed with the 5cm KwK 38 L/42 main gun (1) and the improved mantlet (2), both of which were standard production features by October 1940. Although it is fitted with the early commander's cupola (3) the turret exhaust fan (4) has been moved to the position shown here. Other points to note are the deflector in front of the turret side vision port (5), early drive sprocket (6), shock absorbers (7) and rear idler (8). Note also the Gepäckkasten (9), or turret stowage box, and the bracket holding it to the turret, the air intake covers (10), identifying the Tropen version, fire extinguisher (11), wooden jack block (12) and towing cable (13) stowed on the engine deck and smokegrenade discharger (14).

Notes

1. The Heereswaffenamt, or army ordnance office, was responsible for the design, testing, development, and acceptance of all weaponry including armoured vehicles.

2. Stowage bins were authorised for all Pzkpfw III tanks by an order of 23 April 1941. The modification of Pzkpfw III ausf F and G vehicles for tropical service began in January 1941 and involved cutting large holes in the rear deck hatch lids, which were then protected by armoured covers, and increasing the cooling fan speed.



Identifying production features of the different models mentioned in the text. 1. The turret rear plate of the Pzkpfw III ausf E, ausf F and ausf G was angled steeply forward and incorporated a metal cylinder to which the cupola was fitted. 2. This configuration meant that the Rommelkiste, or stowage box, needed to be held in place by a metal bracket and a considerable gap existed between the box and the turret (3). 4. With the introduction of the Pzkpfw III ausf H, the rear turret plate was redesigned and was now fabricated in one piece (5). 6. The stowage box could now be held in place by hooks without the need for additional supports. This turret shape was maintained until the end of Pzkpfw III production and is the most noticeable difference between the ausf G and ausf H models.

Notes

1. To avoid damage to the rubber road wheels, strict orders were issued that this speed was not to be exceeded.

2. This cover, or Tarnkappe, is present on Fgst Nr. 60428 but missing on some vehicles with higher numbers. It should be noted that most modifications were introduced at slightly different times by manufacturers.

3. The FuG 5, or Funkgerät 5, was the standard radio installed in all German tanks with a range of about 2 to 3 kilometres. The FuG 2 was commonly fitted in company command vehicles and offered the capability to listen on one frequency while transmitting and receiving on another.

Pzkpfw III ausf E. Essentially the first mass produced version of the tank, this model featured a completely different suspension based on a torsion bar system developed by Professor Ferdinand Porsche. In place of the complicated and somewhat delicate leaf springs, six road wheels were each fixed to the hull by a lever which was in turn held on a steel bar that ran across the width of the tank. Large shock absorbers were attached to the first and last lever on each side.

The flexibility and sturdiness of this arrangement allowed the chassis to absorb considerably more shock and although the armour thickness of the turret and hull front was increased to 30mm, with a commensurate increase in weight, the installation of the more

powerful Maybach HL120TR engine meant that a speed of 40 kilometres per hour could be attained (1).

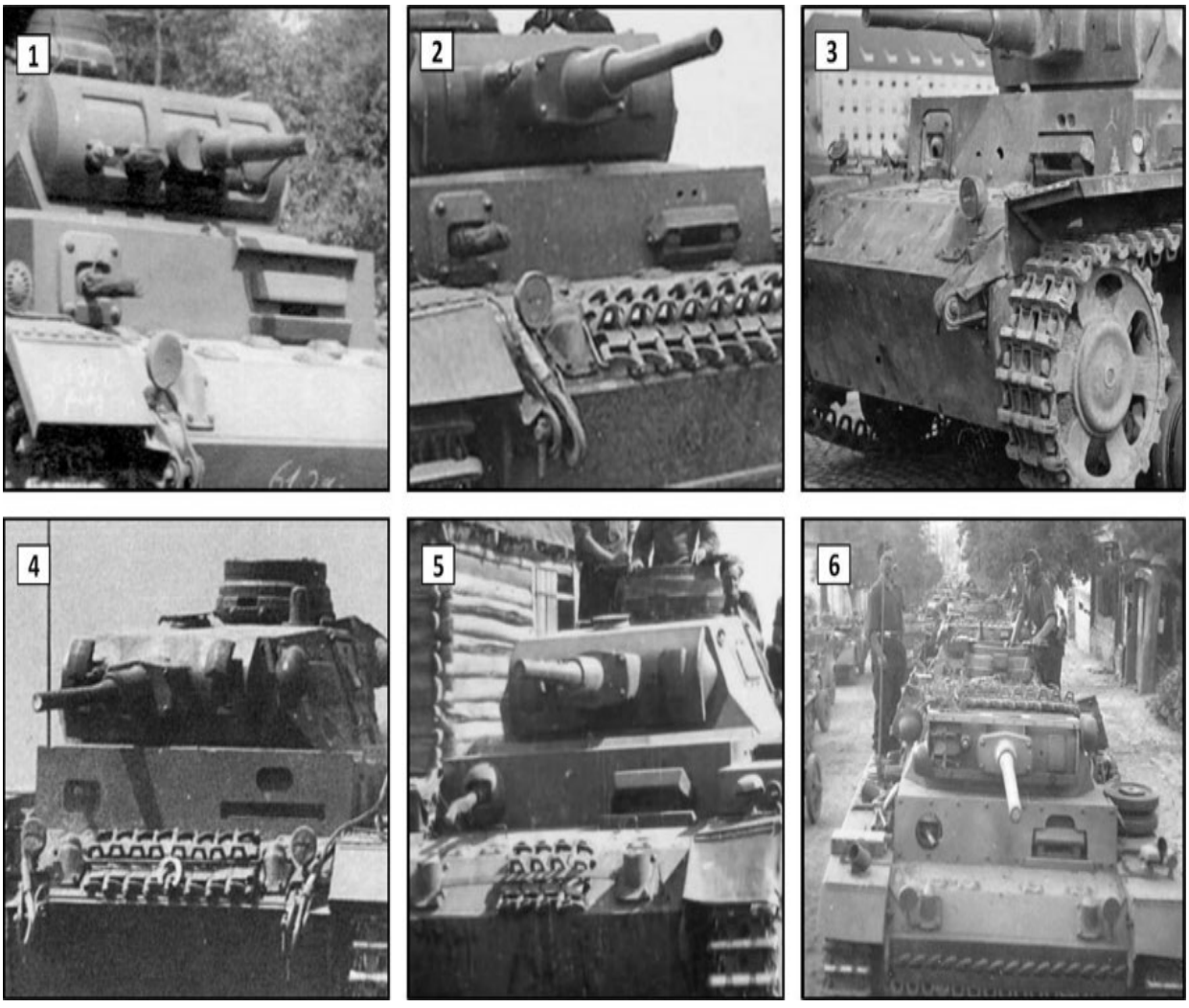
Three return rollers were placed above the road wheels and a new drive sprocket and rear idler were introduced. The hull sides were now constructed of a single metal sheet and the space left by the omission of the leaf spring suspension components meant that an escape hatch could be included between the road wheels and return rollers.

In addition to the suspension and the internal changes, the simple flap over the driver's vision slot was replaced by a two-part armoured visor with a large rain guard and the single-piece access doors on The turret sides were replaced by double doors equipped with vision slots and pistol ports which opened outwards. The two signal ports incorporated into the turret roof on earlier models were retained and the left port was protected by a prominent armoured cover which could also act as a signal light. This cover may have been deleted from very late production versions of the Pzkpfw III ausf E and it was certainly removed from any vehicles returned to the factories for repair (2).

The square-shaped pistol ports on the turret rear were replaced by metal cones. On the right side of the hull a 2-metre antenna was held in an extended mount which could pivot down to 95 degrees to sit in a wooden trough. This was a feature of the subsequent models described here. In tanks allocated to company or platoon commanders the FuG 2 radio was fitted in place of the more common FuG 5 set (3).

Although the shape of the rear hull changed slightly, the starter crank cover and smoke candle discharger of the Pzkpfw III ausf D were retained. The production model of the Pzkpfw III ausf E was armed with the 3.7cm KwK 36 L/45 main gun and total of ninety-six Pzkpfw III ausf E were built by Daimler-Benz, Henschel and MAN, with Fgst Nr. 60401 to 60496.

Only those vehicles converted to Befehlspanzerwagen command tanks saw service in North Africa.



Identifying production features, Pzkpfw III ausf F to Pzkpfw III ausf L: 1. The hull front plate of the Pzkpfw III ausf E and ausf F with the Kugelblende 30 machine-gun mount with bolted-on armour cover, two-part driver's visor and rain guard. The apertures for the driver's periscope are just visible above the visor. The steering brake vent covers next to the headlight and shot deflector ring in front of the turret identify this tank as a Pzkpfw III ausf F. 2. The Pzkpfw III ausf G introduced a new driver's visor which could be swivelled downwards during combat. An improved version of the periscope was installed but the twin apertures were unchanged. These features were continued on the Pzkpfw III ausf H. 3. From December 1940 extra armour in the shape of 30mm thick face-hardened plates was added to a number of Pzkpfw III ausf E, ausf F and ausf G tanks in an effort to bring them up to ausf H standard. Note the towing coupling bolted to the hull front below the headlight. 4. Many early model vehicles were upgraded through the Umbewaffnung programme such as this Pzkpfw III ausf F which has been fitted with the 5cm KwK 38 L/42 gun and 30mm Zusatzpanzer additional armour on the hull front. 5. The Pzkpfw III ausf J retained the driver's visor but the machine gun mount was replaced by the Kugelblende 50 with its distinctive round cover. The hull side plates were extended to create towing eyes and the couplings on earlier models were no longer fitted. The bullet splash guard in front of the diver's visor and wider steering brake vent covers were also introduced with this model. 6. A Pzkpfw III ausf L identified by the long-barrelled 5cm KwK 39 L/60 main gun. Note that the 20mm Vorpanzer spaced armour has been fitted to the hull front while the gun mantlet has the frame only. This tank is one of a small number fitted with S-Mine dischargers, visible her on the trackguards, and tested on the Russian front by Panzer-regiment 4.

Pzkpfw III ausf F. Although this tank was fitted with a slightly more powerful Maybach HL 120 TRM engine and a modified engine cooling system the early production vehicles were almost identical to the Pzkpfw III ausf E and the two models are often difficult to differentiate in photographs. Very early in the production run two armoured cowls were fitted over the cooling

apertures for the steering brakes on the upper hull front. From about March 1940 a shot deflector, which protected the base of the turret, was installed on the hull roof. This was fabricated in three sections and bolted internally. In the same month a Notek light was mounted on the front left trackguard and the tail light on the same guard was replaced by a convoy light. A rectangular hole was cut into the hinged fender to accommodate the convoy light.

In May 1940 the rubber tyres of the road wheels were increased in width from 75mm to 95mm and some tanks seen in contemporary photographs have a mixture of both. The Tarnkappe on the turret roof was dropped by some manufacturers very early in the production run but seems to have been retained by others until at least mid-1940 (1). It was reported that the tracks were liable to hit the shock absorber mounts and in September 1940, in an effort to rectify the problem, the forward return roller was moved closer to the drive sprocket. An interesting feature of the Pzkpfw III ausf F tanks completed by Henschel seems to be the lack of a radio operator's vision port on the right side of the hull. Due to a delay in the delivery of armoured components a number of vehicles, perhaps as many as ninety-six, were completed after July 1940 with the external gun mantlet and 5cm weapon intended for the Pzkpfw III ausf H model. A total of 435 Pzkpfw III ausf F tanks were assembled, numbered from 61001 to 61650, and they served in France, the Balkans, North Africa and Russia.

Pzkpfw III ausf G. This model was a development of the Pzkpfw III ausf F with the major difference being an increase in the thickness of the rear armour from 21mm to 30mm. The first fifty tanks were assembled with the 3.7cm KwK 36 L/45 gun before the 5cm KwK 38 L/42 weapon was introduced which was fitted to the remaining 550 production vehicles (2).

Notes

1. Fgst Nr. 61314, assembled by Henschel, and Fgst Nr. 61225, built by Famo, still had this feature.

2. The last tanks with the 3.7cm guns were built by Alkett in August and September 1940.

Notes

1. The Fgst numbers give here and in the remainder of this section are the ranges allocated and do not correspond to actual production. The range was usually more than required for security reasons.

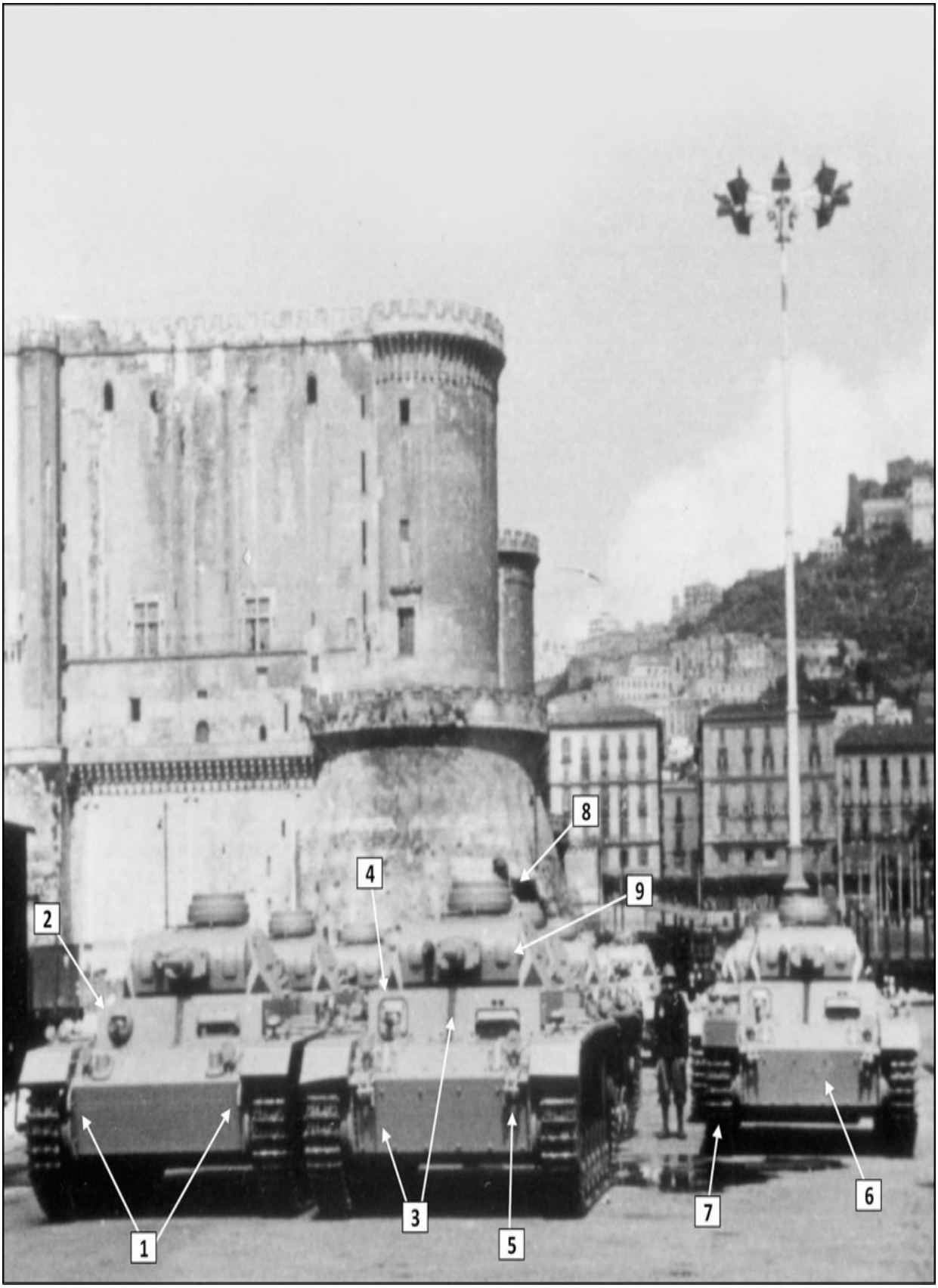
A Notek night-driving light was mounted on the front left trackguard and the tail light was replaced by a convoy light as mentioned for the Pzkpfw III ausf F. The partitioned driver's visor was replaced by a pivoting version, behind which a 90mm thick glass block protected the driver, and a twin periscope was installed. At the hull rear an armoured cover was provided for the smoke candle discharger.

Several modifications introduced into production of the Pzkpfw III ausf F, which was still in production, were also incorporated into the Pzkpfw III ausf G. These included the increase in width of the road wheel tyres from 75mm to 95mm and the placement of the first return roller closer to the drive sprocket.

In June 1940 the ventilation fan was moved to the centre of the turret roof and on some tanks a circular plate covered the hole that had already been cut. A new commander's cupola was introduced which featured vertically opening vision slots and was identical to the version fitted to the Pzkpfw IV. A rudimentary direction indicator, or Richtungszeiger, was located directly in front of the forward vision slot.

At about the same time, face-hardened plates of 30mm thickness were bolted onto the hull glacis, the hull front and hull rear. A number of tanks were assembled with the bolts fixed in place before the armour plates were available and were issued to units in this state. Although images of these tanks are rare, as the plates were usually retro-fitted in the field, they can be seen from time to time.

Late in the production run the widened suspension was fitted with the later drive sprocket and rear idler and redesigned shock absorbers. A total of 600 Pzkpfw III ausf G were assembled before production ended in late 1940, using the range Fgst Nr. 65001 to 65950, and were employed in France, the Balkans, North Africa and Russia (1).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Photographed in May 1941 in the Port of Naples area, where the present-day Via Ammiraglio Ferdinando Acton leads into the Terminal Beverello, with the Castel Nouvo in the background, these tanks are replacements headed for North Africa and are almost certainly painted in Gelbbraun RAL 8000 and possibly a disruptive pattern of Graugrün RAL 7008, the contrast between the two often being difficult to discern in monochrome photographs. Note the extended hull sides (1) and Kugelblende 50 machine-gun mount (2) identifying the Pzkpfw III ausf J at left. The Pzkpfw III ausf H in the centre is fitted with Zusatzpanzer bolted-on armour (3) and Kugelblende 30 with bolted-on cover (4). Note the towing couplings on the hull front (5). The vehicle on the right is also fitted with Zusatzpaner armour (6) but may be a Pzkpfw III ausf G as it seems to be fitted with the narrow Kgs.6111/380/120 tracks (7). All have the later commander's cupola and 5cm KwK 38 L/42 gun and armoured mantlet (8) with two vision flaps (9).

This Pzkpfw III ausf J of Panzer-Regiment 8 is fitted with a complete set of 20mm Vorpanzer spaced armour on the hull front and gun mantlet. These Vorpanzer kits were incorporated into production as they became available and due to supply difficulties many vehicles were fitted with the hull armour only. Tanks are commonly seen with the frame for the turret armour in place but it is thought that the plates were not universally adopted until mid-1942.

Pzkpfw III ausf J. This version was the final development model of the Pzkpfw III tank, subsequent models being variations, and is easily identifiable by the 50mm front plate with a redesigned driver's visor and Kugelblende machine-gun mount. The smoke candle dischargers were dropped from production and the rear hull was made up of two flat armour plates above a deflector for the exhaust. The Tropen air intake system, with its distinctive armoured covers, was standard on this version as were the single-piece inspection hatches on the hull front. The hull side plates were extended at the front providing integral towing eyes which obviated the need for the bolt-on versions of earlier models.

Although the wider suspension was standard on this model a number of photographs exist which show Pzkpfw III tanks fitted with the earlier style drive sprocket and rear idlers. From February 1941 Pzkpfw III which were to be deployd to areas designated as tropical climates (7) were modified at the assembly plants to improve engine cooling rates. Large holes protected by armoured covers were cut in the centre of the ventilation hatches on the engine deck. In addition cooling fan speed was increased and modifications were made to the spark plug openings, clutch housing and an extra oil filter was fitted.

The first Pzkpfw III ausf J tanks that left the assembly lines in March 1941 were externally similar to the previous production models and were armed with the 5cm KwK L/42 main gun. Hitler had been insisting that this weapon be replaced by the long-barrelled 5cm KwK L/60 for some time but it was not until December 1941 that the new gun became a standard feature. A total of 779 Pzkpfw III ausf J models equipped with the L/42 gun were assembled, identified by Fgst Nr. 68001 to 69000, while about 823 vehicles armed with the L/60 weapon were completed and received Fgst Nr. 72001 to 74100. The latter were renamed as explained below. In July 1941 discussions about incorporating Vorpanzer spaced armour into Pzkpfw III production culminated in Hitler's decision that all Pzkpfw III be fitted with additional 20mm thick armour plates. A shortage of support frames meant that a small number of the Pzkpfw III ausf J production run were fitted with Vorpanzer armour on the hull front, probably from September 1941, and it was not until March 1942 that the plates were also fitted to the gun mantlet. This would mean of course that a number of 5cm KwK L/60 armed vehicles were also fitted with Vorpanzer armour.

Pzkpfw III ausf L. Some time between 28 March and 3 April 1942 a new designation, Pzkpfw III ausf L, was introduced to describe all vehicles fitted with the long-barrelled 5cm KwK 39 L/60 gun. Pzkfpw III ausf J tanks assembled prior to April and armed with the L/60 gun were renamed although the vehicle serial number plates were still marked as ausf J. Confusingly, the firm of Henschel & Wegmann continued to use the Pzkpfw III ausf J designation. The new model was identical to the Pzkpfw III ausf J and although Vorpanzer armour was supposed to be standard, most vehicles assembled between April and August 1942 were fitted with full Vorpanzer armour on the hull front with just the frame on the gun mantlet. In January 1942 the vision ports on the turret sides and the right side vision port on the gun mantlet were dropped from production but a large number of vision ports and turrets had been fabricated, the latter with the necessary holes, and the vision ports were welded into place

and it was some time before turrets without the vision ports were delivered. The original order for 1,100 Pzkpfw III ausf L tanks was cancelled in mid-1942 after just 653 vehicles were assembled, using the range Fgst Nr. 74101 to 75500 (8), and production switched to the Pzkpfw III ausf N.

Notes

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1. Temperatures over 28 degrees C.

2. It should be noted that these Fahrgestellenummern were not limited to Pzkpfw III ausf L production and the numbers used by manufacturers in the assembly of the later versions are almost hopelessly mixed. The ranges shown here are merely the official allocations.

A Befehlspanzerwagen III ausf E of Stab, I.Abteilung, Panzer-Regiment 8 photographed in late 1941. These purpose-built command tanks were the only version of the Pzkpfw III ausf E to serve in North Africa. The hull macine gun was removed, although the mount was left in place, and the main gun replaced by a wooden dummy. The tank's only armament was the MG 34 machine gun which was fixed in the turret mantlet and is shown here with its

protective cover. Note the pivoting driver's visor introduced on the Pzkpfw III ausf G and retrofitted to the Befehlspanzerwagen. The distinctive frame aerial, which was an identifying feature of the command tanks, has been removed. An example of a Befehlspanzerwagen III ausf H can be seen on page 13.

This tank of 5.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 8, said to have been photographed at around the time of the El Alamein battles, would at first glance appear to be a Pzkpfw III ausf L armed with the 5cm L/60 long-barrelled gun but it is in fact one of the renamed Pzkpfw III ausf J, here identified by the transverse armour covers on the engine deck. Note the field-modified anti-aircraft machine-gun mount on the commander's cupola. This vehicle is also shown in the Camouflage & Markings section on page 24.

A Pzkpfw III ausf G of 1.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5 being loaded for shipment to North Africa. These tanks were all painted in RAL 7021 Schwartzgrau as detailed in the text. Note the waterproofing on the gun mantlet visors, barrel and hull front.

The question of what camouflage colours were used by the German army in North Africa, and indeed the colours employed to render the turret numbers and markings of the Panzers, has been the subject of debate and speculation for many years. We may never arrive at definitive answers but it is possible to make educated guesses using surviving official orders, the limited number of colour photographs and a comparison of the many monochrome images available (1). Allied intelligence reports, gleaned for the most part from prisoner interrogations, although helpful, need to be approached with caution.

The following text should be read in conjunction with the illustrations and captions presented in the Camouflage & Markings section of this book.

The official documents mentioned here are Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen, or general army orders, which were issued twice-monthly to all formations and establishments of the German Army down to company level and governed all aspects of army life. Throughout the war years several Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen (HM) were published which stipulated the exact colours and methods by which vehicles, guns and buildings were to be painted.

Industrial standards in Germany, including those regarding paint, were regulated by the RAL (2), an organisation set up in 1925 under the auspices of a number of major business concerns and various government authorities, including the military commands. The RAL

and the systems of colour coding which it created are dealt with in some detail in TankCraft 10: Tiger I, German Army Heavy Tank, Southern Front North Africa, Sicily and Italy 1942-1945.

We can be reasonably certain that the vehicles of 5.leichte Afrika-Division that arrived in Tripoli in March 1941 were painted overall in a single colour, RAL 7021 Schwartzgrau. This was a very dark grey shade which had been introduced by HM Nr.864 on 31 July 1940, replacing the two-colour camouflage scheme of Dunkelbraun Nr.45 and Dunkelgrau Nr.46, the latter renamed Schwartzgrau, that was in use during the Polish and French campaigns. It is possible, but unlikely, that some vehicles retained the two-colour scheme. The Pzkpfw III tanks of Panzer-Regiment 5 were all either assembled after the introduction of Schwartzgrau or were older models that had been updated through the Umbewaffnung programme which was instituted in September 1940 (3).

Notes

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1. At the very outset I would like to make it clear that the colour photographs reproduced in Signal magazine, a German wartime publication, were not hand-coloured or colourised but true colour images. The publishers, Ullstein Verlag, were known for the high quality of their work. In addition a number of German military photographers worked with colour film and slides and these are today held in the Bundesarchiv.

2. Reichs-Ausschuss für Lieferbedingungen und Gütesicherung. This can be translated into English as the Commission for Delivery Terms and Quality Assurance.

3. The Umbewaffenung program was an attempt to modernise the early versions of the Pzkpfw III and is explained further in the Technical Details and Modifications section of this book.

On 17 March 1941, shortly after the arrival of the first German troops in North Africa, HM Nr.281 introduced a new scheme where the tanks were to be painted in a base coat of Gelbbraun RAL 8000, a medium yellow-brown, with a disruptive pattern in a grey-green shade known as Graugrün RAL 7008. It was intended that RAL 8000 be the predominant colour, covering surface area and the edges, where the two colours met, were to be feathered. Contrary to some accounts, which suggest that the colour received its name at a later date, the order does indeed describe RAL 8000 as Gelbbraun. Interestingly, HM Nr.281 implies that the grey and brown camouflage of 1940 may still have been in use.

A Pzkpfw III ausf H of Stab, Panzer-Regiment 8, identified by the letter R on the turret side, photographed during the Operation Crusader battles of December 1941. This tank is almost certainly finished in RAL 8000 which faded to a very light shade. The seemingly long barrel is in fact an 8.8cm gun positioned behind the tank.

Photographed as it was being unloaded in North Africa, this Pzkpfw III ausf J is fitted with Vorpanzer armour on both the turret and hull front suggesting that it was built at some time after April 1942. If that time period is correct then the base camouflage colour is almost certainly RAL 8020, a much darker shade than RAL 8000 which it

replaced. Note that the hubs of the spare road wheels seem to have been painted with different colours.

Both RAL 8000 and RAL 7008 had been utilised for some time by the Deutsche Reichsbahn and, given the extensive railway network within Germany and the occupied countries, were probably in plentiful supply. Somewhat surprisingly, the practice of requiring the troops to obtain the necessary stocks through commercial suppliers was retained, at least officially, and an extensive list of companies was included in the body of the order. Given that all these firms were located in Germany it must have proven problematic for the supply officers of Panzer-Regiment 5 to acquire these new colours and the tanks of this formation could be identified by the patchy or worn appearance of the their camouflage well into 1942.

It has often been suggested that Italian camouflage paint was pressed into service but the Italians had only introduced their own sand-coloured scheme on 18 March 1941 and despite the obvious difficulties it seems that a substantial number of German vehicles were coated with RAL 8000, and possibly RAL 7008, to some extent. But many were not, for example the Pzkpfw IV tank commanded by Leutnant Albrecht Zorn of 4.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5 which was described as black ‘without any camouflage paint, as there was no time for that’, during the first week of April 1941 (1). This single sentence helpfully illustrates just how dark Schwartzgrau was and that camouflage paint was in fact available but regarded as a luxury at this stage.

The tanks of Panzer-Regiment 8, which arrived in Africa in late April and early May 1941 (2), would certainly have been painted in the new camouflage colours or at least a base coat of RAL 8000. Photographs of these vehicles, as they wait in Naples to be shipped to North

Africa, show a very neat, comprehensive coating of a light-coloured paint. By the winter of 1941 these tanks appeared noticeably less worn when compared to the vehicles of Panzer-Regiment 5 and it is likely that more than one coat of paint was applied over the Schwartzgrau base coat.

Probably photographed during the summer of 1942, this Pzkpfw III ausf J of 2.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 8 is finished in RAL 8020 and possibly a disruptive pattern of RAL 7027. The contrast between the two colours cannot usually be discerned in monochrome photographs.

Notes

1. I should mention that this is my translation of the description taken from Wolf Heckmann's Rommels Krieg in Afrika: Wüstenfuchse gegen Wüstenratten. Leutnant Zorn's tank, probably numbered 412, took part in the fighting for El Mechili in early April 1941. The suggestion that it was painted black as a propaganda exercise on Rommel's orders is nonsense.

2. With the exception of 3.Kompanie and 7.Kompanie which did not land in North Africa until 19 December 1941.

On 25 March 1942, HM Nr.315 was issued which replaced the North African colours with two new shades referred to as Braun RAL 8020 and Grau RAL 7027. Frustratingly, the contrast evident in monochrome photographs between these two colours is almost non-existent but RAL 8020 is a noticeably darker shade that RAL 8000 which it superseded. The new colours were to be sourced and applied in the same manner as described in the previous order and were only to be used after existing stocks of RAL 8000 and RAL 7008 had been exhausted. As a total of 524 Pzkpfw III tanks were shipped to North Africa between March 1942 and January 1943, including 321 which went to Panzer-Regiment 5 and Panzer-Regiment 8, a substantial number of these vehicles could have been painted in the RAL 8020 base coat. There is some evidence that the so-called North African colours were in fact introduced into armoured vehicle production, most particularly that of the Tiger I tank, from late 1942 (1).

Notes

1. This is examined in detail in TankCraft 20: Tiger I German Army Heavy Tank Eastern Front, Summer 1943.

2. This was a colour in use with the Luftwaffe and it is not known why the Army found it necessary to venture outside the RAL system which at this time contained a number of green shades. This order also saw the end to the practice of units sourcing paint directly from the manufacturers.

It is generally assumed that replacement vehicles were painted in either RAL 8000 or RAL 8020 before they were transported to North Africa but an official note of January 1942 mentions that a number of new tanks had been received without the complete inventory of desert modifications and, although unlikely, this may have included the base colour.

One aspect of vehicle camouflage which is rarely mentioned in connection with the fighting in North Africa is HM Nr.181, issued on 18 February 1943, which stipulated that all vehicles were now to leave the factories and assembly plants in a colour described simply as dark yellow, or Dunkelgelb nach Muster, as no RAL number had been allocated at the time the order was issued. Disruptive camouflage was to be applied by the troops using RLM Olivgrün (2) and Rotbraun RAL 8017 supplied in the form of a paste which could be diluted with either water or petrol, the latter apparently giving the best result.

An amendment to the February order, HM Nr.322 dated 3 April 1943, stipulated that the base colour was to be referred to as Dunkelgelb RAL 7028 while the RLM colour was replaced by Olivgrün RAL 6033.

The 18 February 1943 order stated that the new camouflage would apply to all units of the army, specifically mentioning those serving in Europe, North Africa and Crete. A total of 212 tanks of all types were shipped to North Africa between 12 March and 13 May 1943, when the last Axis units surrendered, and there is no way of knowing if any of these were painted in the February scheme although it is possible.

One last point to consider when discussing these camouflage colours is that operations were conducted, for the most part, in one of the harshest environments on earth.

Tanks painted in April 1941 in RAL 8000, which was a medium yellow-brown shade as mentioned above, appear to be almost white in photographs taken in December and much of the camouflage has been worn away to reveal the original RAL 7021 Schwartzgrau. After months in the North African sun it would be difficult to differentiate between any of the three base coats documented here.

With vehicle camouflage we at least have the official orders to consult but the question of which colours were used for turret numbers and insignia is much less clear. The most basic marking, the famous Afrikakorps unit insignia of a stylised palm tree and swastika, was introduced on 1 April 1941 and was originally intended to be rendered in green for corps-level troops, in white for the vehicles of 5.leichte Afrika-Division and in red for 15.Panzer-Division. Photographs show that these markings were often, but not always, applied on a patch of contrasting colour. But by 7 November 1941 it was ordered that all elements of Panzergruppe Afrika were to use a white sign and units were given just over a week to replace the coloured versions.

Photographic evidence would suggest that this order was sometimes ignored.

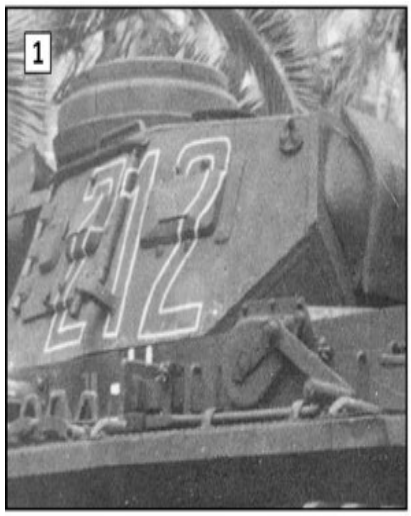
Many readers will be familiar with the three-digit numbering system which was used by the German army at this time to identify tanks within a regiment. Basically the number indicated the company, the platoon and the individual tank. For example, the number 531 would denote the first tank of the third platoon of the regiment's fifth company. Regimental and battalion headquarters used letters and roman numerals and the intricacies of the system are shown in the section dealing with the Kriegsstärkenachweisungen (KstN).

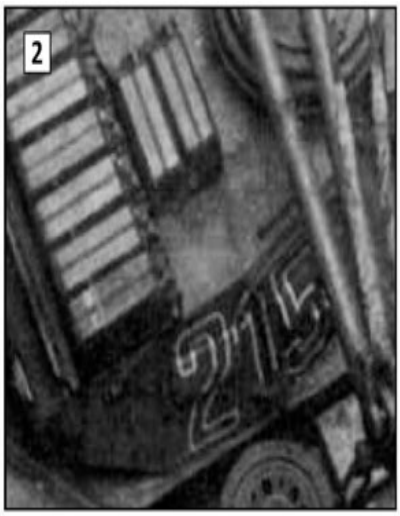
Panzer-Regiment 5 followed this system but the tanks of Panzer-Regiment 8 normally carried a single number identifying the company on the turret side towards the front. Some tanks of this regiment also had the three-digit identifier displayed elsewhere on the vehicle in much smaller numbers and examples of both are shown in the Camouflage & Markings section of this book. The numbers employed by Panzer-Regiment 5 were quite large, taking up most of the turret side, and were repeated on the rear of the Rommelkiste, or turret stowage box. The numbers are usually assumed to have been rendered as a white outline only but a number of monochrome photographs taken in March 1941 show that the number could be a markedly darker shade than the body of the tank which at that time would have been painted in RAL 7021 Schwartzgrau. In addition an officer of 4.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5, captured after the fighting around El Adem in late May 1942, told his captors that all the regiment's tanks were marked with black numbers with a white outline, stressing that this aided recognition at a distance. A colour photograph of a 7.Kompanie Pzkpfw III ausf L, reproduced in the Camouflage & Markings section, shows the solid black number outlined in white. But there are many clear images where the centre of the number and the base colour of the tank appear to be the same and when RAL 8000 camouflage was applied some companies, but

not all, also painted the centre of the number with the lighter shade. This had the effect of rendering the white outline almost invisible over any distance.

My personal opinion is that the black numbers were added to the white outline of as many tanks as time would allow before the regiment departed for Africa, leaving some with the Schwartzgrau centre. This was in any case a very dark colour, almost black, but did tend to fade to a considerably lighter shade and the red numbers sometimes attributed to this regiment are probably Schwartzgrau outlined in white. After the RAL 8000 camouflage had been applied in North Africa many of the numbers could not be discerned at distance and the black centre was eventually reinstated. But it may have been some time before this system was adopted throughout the regiment as a prisoner interrogation of February 1942 suggests that the white outline only numbers were still in use at that time (1).

When they arrived in North Africa all tanks of Panzer-Regiment 5 carried the unit insignia of 3.Panzer-Division, the regiment's former parent formation, and a colour photograph shows that this was rendered in the salmon pink shade which identified Panzer troops, for 6.Kompanie at least. Other colours are of course possible. This sign was not completely replaced by the tanks of 21.Panzer-Division insignia for some time.


1
212


2

3

4
003

5

6
222

7
62

8

9
333

Examples of turret numbers used by Panzer-Regiment 5. 1. Photographed in Trpoli in March 1941 the number applied to this 2.Kompanie Pzkpfw III is very obviously made up of a white outline only. Compare the shade of the centre with the black of the Balkenkreuz just visible on the hull side. 2. Pictured in Naples as the tanks were loaded for North Africa, the number here has a much darker centre, probably black. 3. The same tank photographed just hours earlier. Viewed from a different angle the number here appears much lighter and this image illustrates just how difficult it is to determine colour, or even shades, from the available photographs. 4. A Pzkpfw III of Stab, II.Abteilung photographed during the parade through Tripoli. The centre of the number is quite clearly darker than the body of the tank. 5. A regimental headquarters tank photographed while Panzer-Regiment 5 was training in France as part of 3.Panzer-Division. This number also seems to have a dark centre. 6. When the tanks were first camouflaged the centre of the turret number was also painted as shown here. 7. Some of the regiment's companies may have retained the dark centre of the turret number as this photograph of a 6.Kompanie Pzkpfw III taken near Tobruk in late 1941 would suggest. 8. With wear and a coat of dust the turret numbers with the camouflage-colour centres became almost invisible and were gradually replaced by black numbers with a white outline as this late arrival (9) with Vorpanzer armour shows.

Notes

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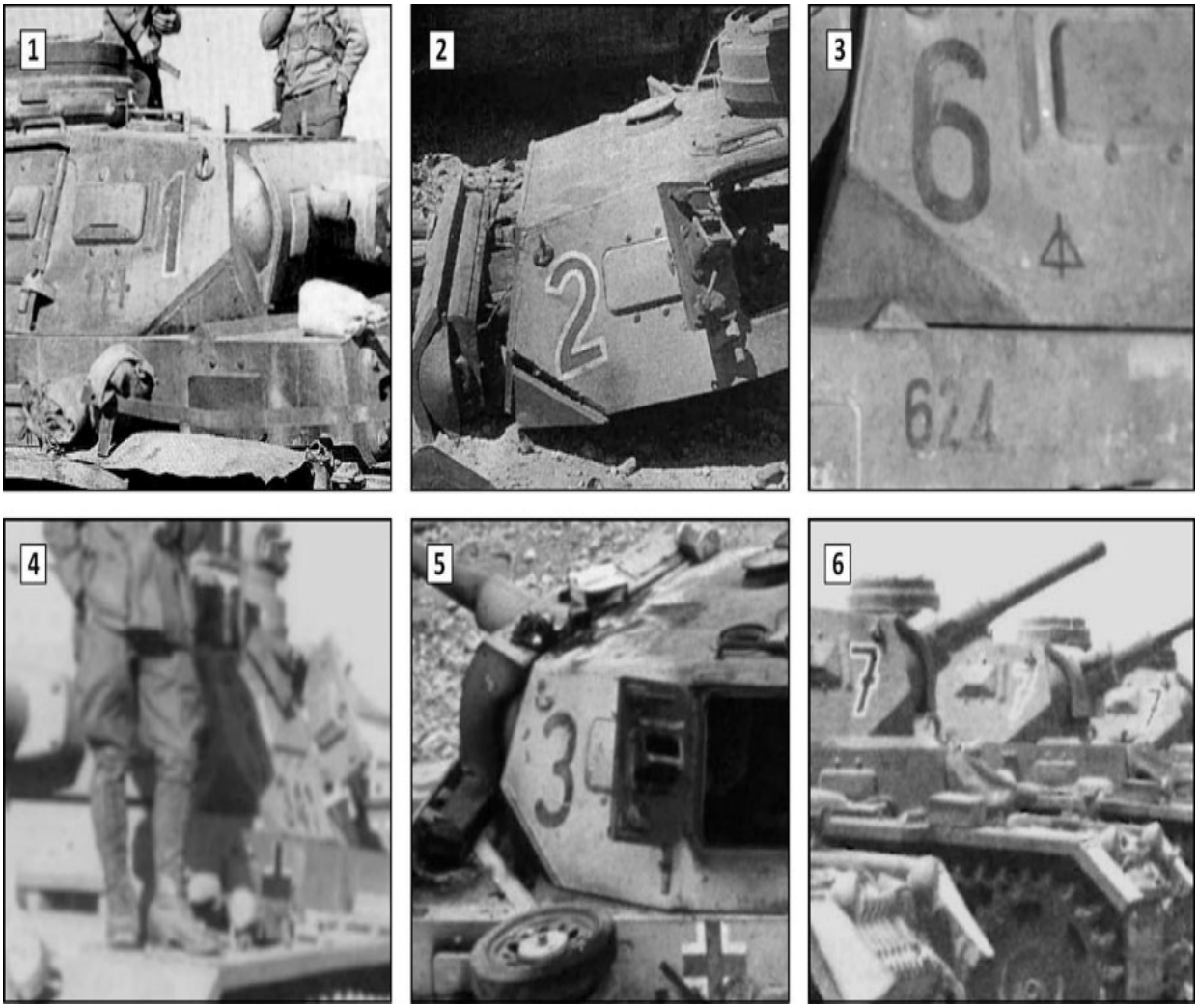
1. This information was given by a crewman of Panzer-Regiment 8 and should therefore be treated with some circumspection.



Examples of turret numbers used by Panzer-Regiment 8.1. and 2. Both these tanks were photographed in late 1941 and are identified by a single number indicating the company in black with a white outline. The addition of the tank's full number, 114, seen on the 1.Kompanie vehicle, was a common feature of that company's Pzkpfw III tanks. 3. Photographed at about the same time the turret number of this 6.Kompanie tank does not have the white outline. Note that the full three-digit number is rendered on the hull side. 4. A Pzkpfw III tank of 3.Kompanie photographed shortly after it arrived in North Africa. The style of number is completely different to that used by the other companies and it is difficult to believe that it could be rendered in black. 5. Another 3.Kompanie tank but photographed much later, during the retreat to Libya in November 1942. This

number is almost certainly black. 6. Tanks of 7.Kompanie photographed in late 1941. Note the difference in the turret numbers.

Notes

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1. This order also forbade the use of signal flags or pennants but the tanks of II.Abteilung could be seen with both well into 1942.

Most sources assume that the turret numbers applied to the tanks of Panzer-Regiment 8 were rendered in red, either as a solid number or with a white outline. The latter is certainly visible in photographs taken shortly after the regiment arrived in North Africa and seems to be more common than the plain number at least up to the end of 1941.

An order issued to the companies of the regiment's I.Abteilung on 13 November 1941 stipulated that the only acceptable markings would be a company number, the regiment's Wolfsangel badge and the 15.Panzer-Division unit insignia. Directions were not given as to which colours were to be used or if the number was to incorporate an outline. In addition a white horizontal strip 5 centimetres wide was to be painted on the rear of the stowage box to identify company commanders (1). This white strip can also be seen on tanks of II.Abteilung and it would seem safe to assume that the order mentioned here was disseminated to both battalions. The size and style of this marking could vary and examples are shown in the Camouflage & Markings section.

Information gained as a result of a prisoner interrogation of February 1942 suggests that solid numbers were in use at that time by Panzer-Regiment 8 and the prisoner concerned specifically contrasted this practice with the white outlines applied to the tanks of Panzer-Regiment 5. But as late as September 1942 it was noted by British intelligence officers that the company number on some tanks was rendered with a white outline while others were a solid black number. The latter was a Pzkpfw III armed with the 5cm L/60 main gun and these were not available in North Africa before January 1942.

Although the use of black numbers would seem obvious from the evidence presented here it is difficult to accept that the turret numbers applied to tanks of 3.Kompanie, which arrived on 19 December 1941, were black when they are so clearly lighter that the Balkenkreuz national insignia in the available monochrome photographs. In addition, images of 7.Kompanie tanks, which were unloaded at the same time, show that on some the company number is almost the same shade as the body of the vehicle. It may be the case that black outlined-white numbers were applied to the first arrivals and the accompanying photographs show a number of these. In December 1941 the companies which had been training in Germany were shipped to North Africa and some of those, but not all, had red numbers.

In the field the use of black was continued for some time and the white outlines that had been applied were retained but by the end of 1942 red numbers were more common, particularly on the tanks seen in Tunisia.

THE KRIEGSSTÄRKENWEISSUNG

PANZER-REGIMENT, FEBRUARY 1941

All formations of the German Army were organised according to detailed tables of establishment referred to as Kriegstärkenachweisung (KstN) which showed the official composition of a unit, listing the exact number of personnel and type of equipment from vehicles to small arms. The tables were numbered and dated, the latter being all-important as some numbers were duplicated. The KstN were accompanied by Kriegsausrüstungsnachweisung (KAN) which listed minor items in detail such as tools and fuel containers but these need not concern us here. On 1 February 1941 a new set of Sonder, or special, KstN and KAN were issued to reorganise the Panzer regiments but most of the changes affected support and ancillary elements and the number of tanks within each subunit did not change. It should be mentioned that regiments and battalions did not automatically undertake a reorganisation process when new KstN came into force, rather, specific orders were promulgated for each unit. Although the February establishments authorised a total of fourteen Pzkpfw IV tanks for the regiment's medium companies no battalion was ordered to create a third platoon, or Zug, and the necessary vehicles were never allocated. Shown below is the official organisation called for by the 1 February 1941 KstN and this should be compared with the actual configurations of Panzer-Regiment 5 and Panzer-Regiment 8 in 1941 which are examined on the following pages.

Stab eines Panzer-Regiments (Sd)
KstN 1103 (Sonder ausführung) von 1.2.1941

KstN 1194 and KstN 1168, depicted at right, were both with the notation 'ab 1941 in KstN 1103 enthalen' meaning that both were integral parts of KstN 1103, the regimental headquarters. The Panzer-Werkstatt-Kompanie, shown below, was responsible for recovery, repair and maintenance.

Panzer-Werkstatt-Kompanie
(für ein Panzer-Regiment
mit 6 Panzer-Kompanien)
KstN 1187 von 1.2.1941

Nachrichten-Zug (mot)
des Stabes eines Panzer-Regiments (Sd)
KstN 1194 (Sonder ausführung) von 1.2.1941
(ab 1941 in KStN 1103 enthalten)

PzBefWg III *PzBefWg III* *Pzkpfw III*

Leichter Panzer-Zug (Sd)
KstN 1168 (Sonder ausführung)
von 1.2.1941 (ab 1941 in KStN 1103 enthalten)

Pzkpfw II *Pzkpfw II* *Pzkpfw II* *Pzkpfw II* *Pzkpfw II*

Stab Panzer-Abteilung (Sd)
KstN 1107 (Sonder ausführung) von 1.2.1941

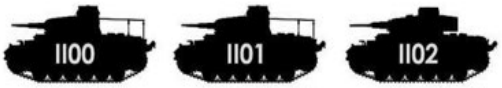
I.Abteilung

Stab Panzer-Abteilung (Sd)
KstN 1107 (Sonder ausführung) von 1.2.1941

As for I.Abteilung

Stabs-Kompanie
einer Panzer-Abteilung (Sd)
KstN 1150 (Sonder ausführung) von 1.2.1941

Nachrichten-Zug



PzBefWg III *PzBefWg III* *Pzkpfw III*

Leichte-Zug

Pzkpfw II *Pzkpfw II* *Pzkpfw II* *Pzkpfw II* *Pzkpfw II*

Staffel Panzer-Abteilung (Sd)
KstN 1178 (Sonder ausführung) von 1.2.1941

Pzkpfw IV *Pzkpfw III* *Pzkpfw III*

Pzkpfw III *Pzkpfw II* *Pzkpfw II*

The Panzer battalion's Staffel, shown above, provided replacement vehicles and personnel to the various companies.

Leichte
Panzer-Kompanie
KstN 1171 von 1.2.1941

Leichte
Panzer-Kompanie
KstN 1171 von 1.2.1941

Leichte
Panzer-Kompanie
KstN 1171 von 1.2.1941

Mittlere
Panzer-Kompanie (Sd)
KstN 1175 (Sonder ausführung) von 1.2.1941

The leichte-Kompanien, or light companies, were organised as in the example shown here. The mittlere, or medium company, replaced the Pzkpfw III tanks with Pzkpfw IV vehicles. The companies were numbered consecutively throughout the regiment with 1 to 4.Kompanien in I.Abteilung and 5 to 8.Kompanien with the regiment's II.Abteilung.

Kompanie-Trupp

Pzkpfw III *Pzkpfw III*

Leichte-Zug

Pzkpfw II *Pzkpfw II* *Pzkpfw II* *Pzkpfw II* *Pzkpfw II*

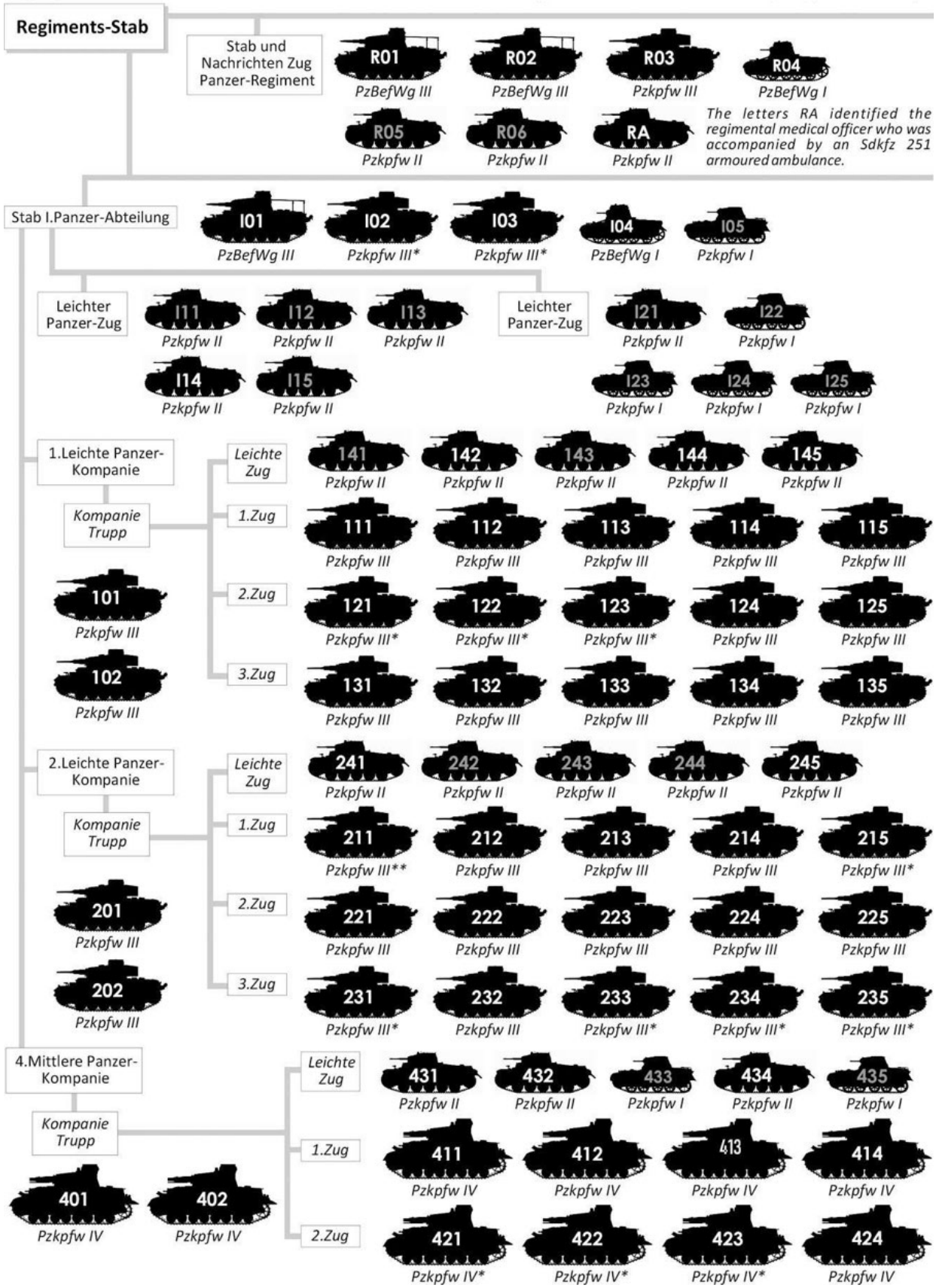
1.Zug *2.Zug* *3.Zug*

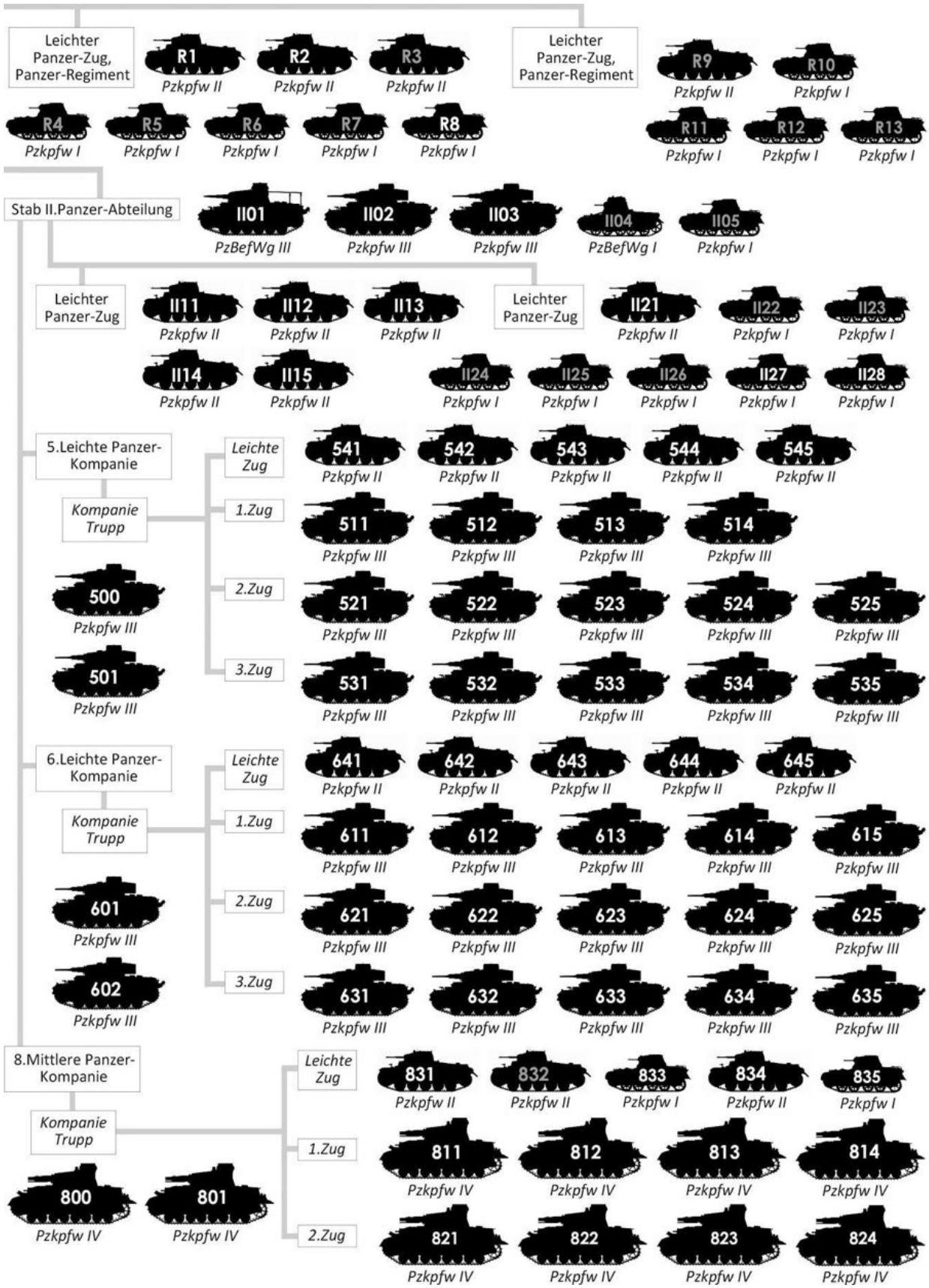
5 x Pzkpfw III *5 x Pzkpfw III* *5 x Pzkpfw III*

Each company followed the numbering system shown here with the company number as the first digit. For example, the tank of the 4.Kompanie commander was numbered 400 while the platoons used 411 to 415, 412 to 425 and 431 to 435. Official numbering systems did exist and were almost constantly evolving but generally followed the pattern depicted in our diagram.

PANZER-REGIMENT 5, MARCH-APRIL 1941

In contrast to the official establishments prescribed by the KstN and KAN lists described on the previous page, formations were often organised for a special purpose or with whatever equipment was available. Panzer-Regiment 5 provides a good illustration of how a unit in the field could be outfitted and was originally sent to North Africa with twenty-five Pzkpfw I, forty-five Pzkpfw II, seventy-one Pzkpfw III, twenty Pzkpfw IV and seven Panzerbefehlswagen command vehicles. The regiment's 3.Kompanie and 7.Kompanie were still in training at the time and a fire on board the freighter Leverkusen on 7 March 1941, which I believe was started when Pzkpfw III number 215 was accidentally dropped into the ship's saw the total loss of ten Pzkpfw III and three Pzkpfw IV tanks. Of the latter, one was almost certainly tank 423 while the others were probably 421 and 422 as platoons tended to be shipped together. Pzkpfw IV number 401 was later renumbered as 423 and 402 was changed to 412 and this has been the cause of some confusion. All the Leverkusen losses are marked in the diagram below by an asterisk. The turret numbers shown in white have been confirmed by photographs or mentioned in the regiment's loss report compiled for the period 19 November to 31 December 1941, which is to say the Operation Crusader battles. The numbers rendered in a darker grey shade are speculative but entirely


Regiments-Stab
Stab und Nachrichten Zug Panzer-Regiment
R01
PzBefWg III
R02
PzBefWg III
R03
Pzkpfw III
R04
PzBefWg I
R05
Pzkpfw II
R06
Pzkpfw II
RA
Pzkpfw II
The letters RA identified the regimental medical officer who was accompanied by an Sdkfz 251 armoured ambulance.
Stab I.Panzer-Abteilung
I01
PzBefWg III
I02
Pzkpfw III*
I03
Pzkpfw III*
I04
PzBefWg I
I05
Pzkpfw I
Leichter Panzer-Zug
I11
Pzkpfw II
I12
Pzkpfw II
I13
Pzkpfw II
I14
Pzkpfw II
I15
Pzkpfw II
Leichter Panzer-Zug
I21
Pzkpfw II
I22
Pzkpfw I
I23
Pzkpfw I
I24
Pzkpfw I
I25
Pzkpfw I
1.Leichte Panzer-Kompanie
Kompanie Trupp
101
Pzkpfw III
102
Pzkpfw III
Leichte Zug
141
Pzkpfw II
142
Pzkpfw II
143
Pzkpfw II
144
Pzkpfw II
145
Pzkpfw II
1.Zug
111
Pzkpfw III
112
Pzkpfw III
113
Pzkpfw III
114
Pzkpfw III
115
Pzkpfw III
2.Zug
121
Pzkpfw III*
122
Pzkpfw III*
123
Pzkpfw III*
124
Pzkpfw III
125
Pzkpfw III
3.Zug
131
Pzkpfw III
132
Pzkpfw III
133
Pzkpfw III
134
Pzkpfw III
135
Pzkpfw III
2.Leichte Panzer-Kompanie
Kompanie Trupp
201
Pzkpfw III
202
Pzkpfw III
Leichte Zug
241
Pzkpfw II
242
Pzkpfw II
243
Pzkpfw II
244
Pzkpfw II
245
Pzkpfw II
1.Zug
211
Pzkpfw III**
212
Pzkpfw III
213
Pzkpfw III
214
Pzkpfw III
215
Pzkpfw III*
2.Zug
221
Pzkpfw III
222
Pzkpfw III
223
Pzkpfw III
224
Pzkpfw III
225
Pzkpfw III
3.Zug
231
Pzkpfw III*
232
Pzkpfw III
233
Pzkpfw III*
234
Pzkpfw III*
235
Pzkpfw III*
4.Mittlere Panzer-Kompanie
Kompanie Trupp
401
Pzkpfw IV
402
Pzkpfw IV
Leichte Zug
431
Pzkpfw II
432
Pzkpfw II
433
Pzkpfw I
434
Pzkpfw II
435
Pzkpfw I
1.Zug
411
Pzkpfw IV
412
Pzkpfw IV
413
Pzkpfw IV
414
Pzkpfw IV
2.Zug
421
Pzkpfw IV*
422
Pzkpfw IV*
423
Pzkpfw IV*
424
Pzkpfw IV


Leichter Panzer-Zug, Panzer-Regiment
R1
Pzkpfw II
R2
Pzkpfw II
R3
Pzkpfw II
Leichter Panzer-Zug, Panzer-Regiment
R9
Pzkpfw II
R10
Pzkpfw I
R4
Pzkpfw I
R5
Pzkpfw I
R6
Pzkpfw I
R7
Pzkpfw I
R8
Pzkpfw I
R11
Pzkpfw I
R12
Pzkpfw I
R13
Pzkpfw I
Stab II.Panzer-Abteilung
II01
PzBefWg III
II02
Pzkpfw III
II03
Pzkpfw III
II04
PzBefWg I
II05
Pzkpfw I
Leichter Panzer-Zug
II11
Pzkpfw II
II12
Pzkpfw II
II13
Pzkpfw II
Leichter Panzer-Zug
II21
Pzkpfw II
II22
Pzkpfw I
II23
Pzkpfw I
II14
Pzkpfw II
II15
Pzkpfw II
II24
Pzkpfw I
II25
Pzkpfw I
II26
Pzkpfw I
II27
Pzkpfw I
II28
Pzkpfw I
5.Leichte Panzer-Kompanie
Leichte Zug
541
Pzkpfw II
542
Pzkpfw II
543
Pzkpfw II
544
Pzkpfw II
545
Pzkpfw II
Kompanie Trupp
1.Zug
511
Pzkpfw III
512
Pzkpfw III
513
Pzkpfw III
514
Pzkpfw III
500
Pzkpfw III
2.Zug
521
Pzkpfw III
522
Pzkpfw III
523
Pzkpfw III
524
Pzkpfw III
525
Pzkpfw III
501
Pzkpfw III
3.Zug
531
Pzkpfw III
532
Pzkpfw III
533
Pzkpfw III
534
Pzkpfw III
535
Pzkpfw III
6.Leichte Panzer-Kompanie
Leichte Zug
641
Pzkpfw II
642
Pzkpfw II
643
Pzkpfw II
644
Pzkpfw II
645
Pzkpfw II
Kompanie Trupp
1.Zug
611
Pzkpfw III
612
Pzkpfw III
613
Pzkpfw III
614
Pzkpfw III
615
Pzkpfw III
601
Pzkpfw III
2.Zug
621
Pzkpfw III
622
Pzkpfw III
623
Pzkpfw III
624
Pzkpfw III
625
Pzkpfw III
602
Pzkpfw III
3.Zug
631
Pzkpfw III
632
Pzkpfw III
633
Pzkpfw III
634
Pzkpfw III
635
Pzkpfw III
8.Mittlere Panzer-Kompanie
Leichte Zug
831
Pzkpfw II
832
Pzkpfw II
833
Pzkpfw I
834
Pzkpfw II
835
Pzkpfw I
Kompanie Trupp
1.Zug
811
Pzkpfw IV
812
Pzkpfw IV
813
Pzkpfw IV
814
Pzkpfw IV
800
Pzkpfw IV
801
Pzkpfw IV
2.Zug
821
Pzkpfw IV
822
Pzkpfw IV
823
Pzkpfw IV
824
Pzkpfw IV

PRODUCT CONTACT DETAILS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dragon Models Ltd

B1-10/F., 603-609 Castle Peak Rd,

Kong Nam Industrial Building,

Tsuen Wan, N. T, Hong Kong

www.dragon-models.com

Tamiya Inc

Shizuoka City, Japan

www.tamiya.com

First To Fight

ul. Jana Bulhaka 11,

01-472, Warszawa,

Poland

www.wrzesien1939.pl/

Miniart

144 B Kharkivske Highway,

02091 Kiev,

Ukraine

www.miniart-models.com

Panzerart

Ul. Borowa 7,

41-260 Slakow,

Poland

www.panzerart.pl

Royal Model

Via E. Montale, 19-95030,

Pedara, Italy

www.royalmodel.com

Italeri S.p.A.

via Pradazzo 6/b,

40012 Calderara di Reno, Bologna, Italy

www.italeri.com

Rye Field Model

www.ryefield-model.com

OB Grigorov

www.shop.okbgrigorov.com

Passion Models

This Japanese company is affiliated with

MS Models Japan.

www.passionmodels.jp

Hauler

Jan Sobotka,

Moravska 38, 620 00 Brno,

Czech Republic

www.hauler.cz

Voyager

Room 501, No.411 4th Village,

SPC Jinshan District, Shanghai 200540,

P.R.China

www.voyagermodel.com

Griffon Model

Suite 501, Bldg 01, 418 Middle Longpan Rd,

Nanjing, P.R. China

www.griffonmodel.com

Aber

ul. Jalowcowa 15, 40-750 Katowice, Poland

www.aber.net.pl

E.T. Model

www.etmodeller.com

Friulmodel

H 8142. Urhida, Nefelejcs u. 2., Hungary

www.friulmodel.hu

Modelkasten

Chiyoda-ku Kanda, Nishiki-Cho 1-7, Tokyo,

Japan

www.modelkasten.com

Very difficult to navigate but worthwhile.

Black Dog

Petr Polanka,

Letecká 549,

Libcice nad Vltavou,252 66,

Czech Republic

www.blackdog.cz

Spade Ace Models

This company may have closed but the tracks are avaialble from Sincere Hobby in Hong Kong.

www.sincerehobby.com

Eduard Model Accessories

Mirova 170, 435 21 Obrnice,

Czech Republic

www.eduard.com

Master Club

www.masterclub.ru

It appears that this firm is closely associated with Armour35, a Russsian mail-order firm.

RB Model

Powstancow Wlkp.29B,

64-360 Zbaszyn,

Poland

www.rbmodel.com

Zvezda (Zvezda-America)

www.zvezda-usa.com

Note that the Russian catalogue is not the same as the US version.

OzArmour

PO Box 51,

Burpengary, QLD, 4505,

Australia

www.ozarmourcom.au

Kaizen

Like many Chinese companies this is hard to pin down to an exact location. The tracks are available from MS Models Japan, a firm for which I can personally vouch.

www.msmodelswebshop.jp

Attack Hobby Kits

Kodymova 2539/3

158 00 Prague 5, Czech Republic

www.attack-kits.eu

JK Resin

This Czech company does not have an online store but their products are available in Europe and the UK from Tracks-n-Troops.

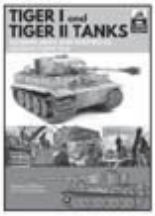
www.tracks-n-troops.eu

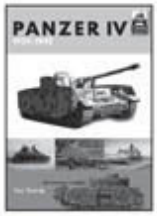
In writing this book I referred extensively to the Panzer Tracts series of books created by the late Thomas L. Jentz and Hilary Louis Doyle and to Achtung Panzer No 2 Panzerkampfwagen IIIedited by Hiroshi Ichimura. The latter is somewhat dated but the brilliant illustrations of Mitsuru Bitoh and Tomioka Yoshikatsu make this book a very

pleasant experience although there are some small errors, mostly regarding the classification of the different variants. Another invaluable resource is Thomas Jentz's Panzertruppen books, which I would recommend to any reader with an interest in German armour of the Second World War period. I should also acknowledge the work of Martin Block and the late Ron Klages whose research on unit histories and vehicle allocations would fill many volumes, and I would like to thank the modellers who graciously allowed me to publish the images of their work. I must make special mention of Jan Zdiarsky from Eduard Model Accessories, Freddie Leung of Dragon Models and the crew at E.T. Models who are always ready to help. As always, I am indebted to Karl Berne, Valeri Polokov and J.Howard Parker for their invaluable assistance with the photographs and period insignia.

A Pzkpfw III ausf G of 1.Kompanie, Panzer-Regiment 5 photographed in late 1941 during the fighting around Tobruk. Note that the turret number is repeated on the stowage box on the hull rear above the smoke candle dischargers. Note also the spare track links on the hull side which was an identifying feature of the Pzkpfw III tanks of this regiment.

The aim of these innovative series is to provide modelmakers and enthusiasts with a new standard of primarily visual reference to both the full-size vehicles and their models, using detailed line drawings, plans and photographs, many in full colour. Each book is devoted to a famous military vehicle – chosen for its popularity as a modelling subject – but will range from main battle tanks to 4x4s.





Tiger I and Tiger II: Tanks of the German Army and Waffen-SS
Eastern Front 1944

Sherman Tanks of the British Army and Royal Marines
Normandy Campaign 1944

Panther Tanks
Germany Army and Waffen SS, Normandy Campaign 1944

Churchill Tanks
British Army, North-West Europe 1944–45

Panzer IV
1939–1945

Jagdpanther Tank Destroyer
German Army and Waffen-SS, Western Europe 1944–1945

Panzer I & II
Blueprint for Blitzkrieg 1933–1941

T-34
Russia's Armoured Spearhead

Tiger I
German Army Heavy Tank, Southern Front, North Africa, Sicily and Italy, 1942–1945

Cromwell and Centaur Tanks
British Army and Royal Marines, North-west Europe 1944–1945

Centurion
Armoured Hero of Post-War Tank Battles

Sherman Tanks, US Army, North-Western Europe, 1944–1945

Tiger I and Tiger II Tanks, German Army and Waffen-SS, The Last Battles in the West, 1945

T-54/55
Soviet Cold War Main Battle Tank

Tank Destroyer
Achilles and M10, British Army Anti-Tank Units, Western Europe, 1944–1945

Panther Tanks: Germany Army and Waffen-SS
Defence of the West, 1945

Chieftain
British Cold War Main Battle Tank

Stug III and IV
German Army, Waffen-SS and Luftwaffe, Western Front, 1944-1945

Challenger 1
British Main Battle Tank of the Gulf War

Tiger I – German Army Heavy Tank
Eastern Front, Summer 1943

M1 Abrams
The US's Main Battle Tank in American and Foreign Service, 1981–2019

M48 Patton
American Post-war Main Battle Tank

Panther Tanks: German Army Panzer Brigades
Western and Eastern Fronts, 1944–1945

Panzer III: German Army Light Tank
Operation Barbarossa 1941

Challenger 2
British Main Battle Tank of the Gulf War

Leopard 2
NATO's First Line of Defence, 1979–2020

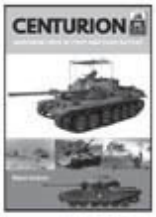
Tiger I & Tiger II Tanks
German Army and Waffen-SS Normandy Campaign 1944

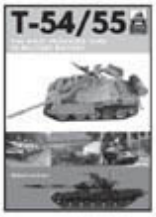
Jagdpanzer IV: German Army and Waffen-SS Tank Destroyers
Western Front, 1944–1945

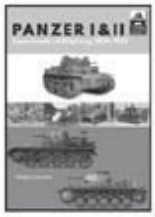
Tiger I and Tiger II Tanks
German Army and Waffen-SS The Last Battles in the East, 1945

Panther Medium Tank
IV. SS-Panzerkorps Eastern Front, 1944

Hetzer – Jagdpanzer 38 Tank Destroyer
German Army and Waffen-SS Western Front, 1944–1945







A wide range of kits and accessories attests to the long-standing popularity of these military vehicles as modelling subjects, while significant differences between different variants offers opportunities to 'individualize' models, as is so well illustrated in these books by many archive and modern photographs.